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Plays of AMERICAN *Life and Fantasy*

COLLECTED BY

EDITH J. R. ISAACS
EDITOR
"Theatre Arts Monthly"

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NOTE

The variety of scene and character in these plays is not haphazard. The plays, all of which have appeared during the last twelve years in *Theatre Arts Monthly*, were originally chosen because, in addition to their reading and acting value, they presented a phase of American character or a bit of the American scene which seemed to be representative material for drama. There was always behind the printing of the individual plays, the thought of bringing them all together in a book. The editor wishes at this time to acknowledge the courtesy of the authors, publishers, and agents who have made this possible.

THE EDITOR.

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INTRODUCTION

Every book that is made ought to be able, by some individual worth or charm or purpose, to defend its right to a place in the library. And especially every play or book about the theatre. For the world of the theatre is essentially not the world of books. It is the world of the living image which man makes of himself and his neighbors, his friends and enemies, his heroes and his gods, in their living struggle with each other and with the forces of character and of nature which are stronger than man or gods. Whatever other quality the theatre has, it has nothing of the tranquillity and leisure and solitary peace of the library.

So here is the dilemma: a book which disturbs the library's peace is an intruder. A book of the theatre which does not at once recreate in the reader the sense of participating in the life and motion and vigorous encounter which is the mark of the theatre, fails of its own integrity. That is the reason why so many good libraries have no plays in them; why so many playwrights refuse to have their plays printed, why so many publishers give plays a chilly welcome. It is a good reason—for folk without human interest and without imagination. But the man who has once learned to *see* a play from print, to build a theatre in the thin air round his library armchair and to people it from the pages of a book, has found the way

to a comradeship and understanding, to an achievement and high adventure that are better than the world's best peace. And in a country, like this great America of ours, where there are so few cities with living theatres, the man who wants to find a way to set himself free for an hour from every day's necessities can do no better than learn to read plays, or rather to see plays, reading them.

This book of *Plays of American Life and Fantasy* is intended for that man. Not for him alone, of course, but still for him. If he likes the plays, he can cast them after his own desire. He can make John Barrymore stop that nonsense of the movies long enough to play Tiero, with Doris Keane (why not?) as Cleofante; he can capture Roland Young for Hugh in *Rose Windows,* put Walter Huston into *Bumblepuppy,* let Ben Smith recreate the part of *The No 'Count Boy.* Or, if he pleases and has a mind to act (alone, and in a library) he can play all the leads himself opposite Helen Hayes and Katharine Cornell. What book in his library will offer him more?

At the door of the theatre this book comes knocking too, a little louder even than at the library door, asking admission for its varied company. The names of the authors, among them many of America's most distinguished dramatists, are, if you listen to their sound and source, in themselves a hint of what the book brings. They are names that have come to many parts of America from many corners of the world, Young, O'Neill and Kreymborg, Alexander and Ruthenburg and Brody, Ernst and Dunbar.

They have found drama wherever they went and recognized it where they found it.

Naturally enough, the people of whom they write are not the ones whose voices you hear around you all day long. They are not even the ones whom you meet in the ordinary life of our playhouses. They are men and women—born of many soils and many races—all of whom call themselves American by right of birth or hope or struggle; whom we must know if we are ever fully to know ourselves, since they are a part of that vivid human panorama of which we too are a part. They are New Englander and French and Dutch and Indian, Scandinavian, Negro, Creole and Russian, men of the southern mountains and women of the west, the dreamer and the seeker after gold, the moonshiner, the bigot and the poet, the tragic and the comic souls, the noble and ignoble. In the directions for the scenes of the various plays is another indication of their range:

The rear of Miles Barstow's simple frame house in a thrifty New Hampshire village.

A grove in the Blackfoot Country.

The cramped living room of a trackwalker's shack in the Cascade Mountains, Oregon.

A small clump of shade trees not far from the Prinnel farmhouse in one of the older states of the South.

Mammy Saunders' bedroom in a house just off Carmen Street, New York.

An imaginary town or village street early any spring morning most anywhere.

A creek in the Yukon country in the days preceding the epic gold rush of the '90's.
Drawing room of Madame Castillon's home, New Orleans.
The kitchen of a Harlem flat.

Once in a while and increasingly during the last creative decade, we have met such scenes, such people in our professional theatre. In *Anna Christie*, *The Hairy Ape*, and *Lucky Sam McCarver*, in *Sun-Up* and *Seventeen*, *In Abraham's Bosom* and *They Knew What They Wanted*. More often they have come to us in farce and comedy, gayly translated into life by versatile actors most of whom got their knowledge of character and their technique in the theatres of "the sticks" or in vaudeville.

Some day we will open our theatre doors much wider to the playwrights and the actors who can vivify American life and character for us. Some day we will open the gates of all our cities, large and small, as wide to the theatre as to the library or the school. When we do we will begin to have an understanding of America which cannot be helped along much by party politics and interstate commerce, by radios and standard motor cars. Until then, let us read plays in the library and the classroom. Or let us play them where we can—in Little Theatres and colleges, in clubs and halls and churches. Or let us build open stages at the street corners, like the players of the old Italian comedy, where the passer-by may join us. These plays of American life belong to the folk of all such theatres.

Plays of Fantasy, the last section of this book,

are really only a comment on the others, or rather on the way in which a playwright, who has something the soul of a poet, works when he reverses the easier, the realistic, method and writes of what he hopes and dreams rather than of what he sees and knows. As when Alfred Kreymborg, born under the noise of the elevated, makes puppets of his people of the market-place, or Zoë Akins, coming out of Missouri, sets her stage in Italy for *The Portrait of Tiero* and paints a mediæval murder as rich and colorful, as clear and hard and beautiful as any painting of old Florence.

If you have watched the arts develop in America you have seen painting and poetry and fiction finding their sources not in the printing room or in the dealer's counting house, but in the artist's memory of a certain kind of living, or in the fantasy by which he escapes from more personal memories. So Carl Sandburg writes of Chicago and Sherwood Anderson of Winesburg, Ohio, and so Edwin Arlington Robinson writes of Tilbury which he remembers, and of King Arthur's Court, with equal quality.

Perhaps you have been disappointed then to find the theatre, the most eternal and responsive of the arts, so often hunting for inspiration in the box offices of a few dull buildings along a few dull streets of a big machine-made city. You know that great drama was never born from such sources or reared under such conditions. Sometimes people say that life here is itself so dramatic that all we require in the nature of theatre is entertainment after busy days, that our newspapers and our police courts, our tenements and

baseball diamonds satisfy our need. But that is nonsense, if for no other reason than that New York is not America, and all America is not living in sky-scrapers, with iron grinding in the ears all day, and electricity darkening the stars at night. Read *Kills-With-Her-Man, The No 'Count Boy, Charivari, Spring Sluicing, The End of the Trail,* and see if that is all there is. This most dramatic of all countries has the same need for theatres that all other great nations have had. The material for great drama and the seeds of fine playwriting are to be found all over the country. All we need to do to achieve them is to grow up theatrically. All we need is playhouses, actors, playwrights, directors and an audience! Which sounds like a great deal! But which would not sound like so much if we said the same thing in another way. In this way, for example: all we need is to become more theatre-minded, because such is the way of the world that when you have a mind for the theatre you will soon have the theatre.

That is one of the recompenses the theatre offers for the great defect of being æsthetically an "impure medium." The child who molds clay rabbits may some day be a sculptor or may not. Years of playing with gay chalks and paints may help to make an artist of him or may not. He will, perhaps, have found release for young imagination and come to understand a little more than otherwise the ways of art. And that may be enough; that is enough. But unless he does become a sculptor, painter, poet, his knowledge of how they work gives him no part in

their creation. With the theatre all this is different. You may do no more than buy a ticket for the opening and yet help to create a play or kill it. A work of theatre art is the joint work of the playwright who contributes the script, the actor who adds the moving presence, the designer who supplies the background—what Robert Edmond Jones calls "the wind that quickens the action"—the director who fuses their gifts, and the audience that gives life to the whole.

An audience is almost as much a part of the creative making of the play as the dramatist or the actor. The more an audience thinks—naturally and spontaneously—in terms of the theatre, the more hope there is for a play to come to life under its eyes. But a natural theatre-mind is a rare gift in civilized society, especially in Anglo-Saxon society. We think theatre to-day largely only by association with the theatre. That is what makes so important what some folks call "this mad dabbling in the theatre" by schools and colleges, little theatres and workshops.

We are, by associating with the arts of the theatre, gradually recreating our theatre-mindedness; we are laying the foundation for a thousand theatres.

And one more word. This book is not intended to teach anybody anything, neither about play-writing nor about history, art or morals. But it will fail of a part of its purpose if it does not encourage and assist the teacher who is trying to open up new vistas in the theatre, vistas of new material and new technique. It is not intended to make life easy and unrewarding for the director who would produce only the plays that some one else has searched out and

prepared for him. But it will be disappointing if the collection does not tempt the keen director with vivid single plays and with varied groups of plays that, presented as one performance, will together tell a tale of life and character more unified than many expressionist plays written by one pen and with one protagonist. Try half a dozen combinations from the list, borrow a name as good as *Americana*, and see what happens.

EDITH J. R. ISAACS.

NEW YORK,
October, 1928.

MOONSHINE

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MOONSHINE

by

ARTHUR HOPKINS

CHARACTERS

LUKE HAZY, Moonshiner

A REVENUE OFFICER

PLACE: *Hut of a mountaineer in the mountain wilds of North Carolina.*

SCENE: *Door back left. Window back right center. Old deal table right center. Kitchen chair at either side of table, not close to it. Old cupboard in left corner. Rude stone fireplace left side. On back wall near door is a rough pencil sketch of a man hanging from a tree.*

At rise of curtain a commotion is heard outside of hut.

LUKE [*off stage*]: It's all right, boys. . . . Jist leave him to me. . . . Git in there, Mister Revenue. [REVENUE, *a Northerner in city attire, without hat, clothes dusty, is pushed through doorway.* LUKE, *a lanky, ill-dressed Southerner, following, closes door.* REVENUE'S *hands are tied behind him.*] You must excuse the boys for makin' a demonstra-

tion over you, Mr. Revenue, but you see they don't come across you fellers very frequent and they allas gits excited.

REVENUE: I appreciate that I'm welcome.

LUKE: 'Deed you is, and I'm just agoin' to untie your hands long 'nuff fer you to take a sociable drink. [*Goes to stranger, feels in all pockets for weapons.*] Reckon yer travelin' peaceable. [*Unties hands.*] Won't yer sit down?

REVENUE [*drawing over chair and sitting*]: Thank you.

[*Rubs wrists to get back circulation.*]

LUKE [*going over to cupboard and taking out jug*]: Yessa, Mister, the boys ain't seen one o' you fellers fer near two years. Began to think you wus goin' to neglect us. I wus hopin' you might be Jim Dunn. Have a drink?

REVENUE [*starts slightly at mention of* JIM DUNN]: No, thank you, your make is too strong for me.

LUKE: It hain't no luck to drink alone when you got company. Better have some.

REVENUE: Very well, my friend, I suffer willingly.

[*Drinks a little and chokes.*]

LUKE [*draining cup*]: I reckon ye all don't like the flavor of liquor that hain't been stamped.

REVENUE: It's not so bad.

LUKE: The last Revenue that sit in that chair got drunk on my make.

REVENUE: That wouldn't be difficult.

LUKE: No, but it wuz awkward.

REVENUE: Why?

LUKE: I had to wait till he sobered up before I give him his ticket. I didn't feel like sendin' him to

Heaven drunk. He'd a found it awkward climbin' that golden ladder.

REVENUE: Thoughtful executioner.

LUKE: So you see mebbe you kin delay things a little by dallyin' with the licker.

REVENUE [*picking up cup, getting it as far as his lips, slowly puts it down*]: The price is too great.

LUKE: I'm mighty sorry you ain't Jim Dunn. But I reckon you ain't. You don't answer his likeness.

REVENUE: Who's Jim Dunn?

LUKE: You ought to know who Jim Dunn is. He's just about the worst one of your revenue critters that ever hit these parts. He's got four of the boys in jail. We got a little reception all ready for him. See that?

[*Pointing to sketch on back wall.*]

REVENUE [*looking at sketch*]:Yes.

LUKE: That's Jim Dunn.

REVENUE [*rising, examining picture*]: Doesn't look much like any one.

LUKE: Well, that's what Jim Dunn'll look like when we git 'im. I'm mighty sorry you hain't Jim Dunn.

REVENUE: I'm sorry to disappoint you.

LUKE [*turning to cupboard and filling pipe*]: Oh, it's all right. I reckon one Revenue's about as good as another, after all.

REVENUE: Are you sure I'm a revenue officer?

LUKE [*rising*]: Well, since we ketched ye climin' trees an' snoopin' round the stills, I reckon we won't take no chances that you hain't.

REVENUE: Oh.

LUKE: Say, mebbe you'd like a seggar. Here's one

I been savin' fer quite a spell back, thinkin' mebbe I'd have company some day.

[*Brings out dried-up cigar, hands it to him.*]

REVENUE: No, thank you.

LUKE: It hain't no luck to smoke alone when ye got company. [*Striking match and holding it to* REVENUE.] Ye better smoke. [REVENUE *bites off end and mouth is filled with dust, spits out dust.* LUKE *holds match to cigar. With difficulty* REVENUE *lights it.*] That's as good a five-cent cigar as ye can git in Henderson.

REVENUE [*after two puffs, makes wry face, throws cigar on table*]: You make death very easy, Mister.

LUKE: Luke's my name. Yer kin call me Luke. Make you feel as though you had a friend near you at the end—Luke Hazy.

REVENUE: [*starting as though interested, rising*]: Not the Luke Hazy that cleaned out the Crosby family?

LUKE [*startled*]: How'd you hear about it?

REVENUE: Hear about it? Why, your name's been in every newspaper in the United States. Every time you killed another Crosby the whole feud was told all over again. Why, I've seen your picture in the papers twenty times.

LUKE: Hain't never had one took.

REVENUE: That don't stop them from printing it. Don't you ever read the newspapers?

LUKE: Me read? I hain't read nothin' fer thirty years. Reckon I couldn't read two lines in a hour.

REVENUE: You've missed a lot of information about yourself.

LUKE: How many Crosby's did they say I killed?

REVENUE: I think the last report said you had just removed the twelfth.

LUKE: It's a lie! I only killed six . . . that's all they wuz—growed up. I'm a-waitin' fer one now that's only thirteen.

REVENUE: When'll he be ripe?

LUKE: Jes' as soon as he comes a-lookin' fer me.

REVENUE: Will he come?

LUKE: He'll come if he's a Crosby.

REVENUE: A brave family?

LUKE: They don't make 'em any braver—they'd be first-rate folks if they wuzn't Crosbys.

REVENUE: If you feel that way why did you start fighting them?

LUKE: I never started no fight. My gran'dad had some misunderstandin' with their gran'dad. I don't know jes' what it wuz about, but I reckon my gran'dad wuz right, and I'll see it through.

REVENUE: You must think a lot of your grandfather.

LUKE: Never seen 'im, but it ain't no luck goin' agin yer own kin. Won't ye have a drink?

REVENUE: No—no—thank you.

LUKE: Well, Mr. Revenue, I reckon we might as well have this over.

REVENUE: What?

LUKE: Well, you won't get drunk, and I can't be put to the trouble o' havin' somebody guard you.

REVENUE: That'll not be necessary.

LUKE: Oh, I know yer like this yer place now, but this evenin' you might take it into yer head to walk out.

REVENUE: I'll not walk out unless you make me.

LUKE: Tain't like I'll let yer, but I wouldn't blame yer none if yu tried.
REVENUE: But I'll not.
LUKE [*rising*]: Say, Mistah Revenue, I wonder if you know what you're up against?
REVENUE: What do you mean?
LUKE: I mean I gotta kill you.
REVENUE [*rising, pauses*]: Well, that let's me out.
LUKE: What do yu mean?
REVENUE: I mean that I've been trying to commit suicide for the last two months, but I haven't had the nerve.
LUKE [*startled*]: Suicide?
REVENUE: Yes. Now that you're willing to kill me, the problem is solved.
LUKE: Why, what d'ye want to commit suicide fer?
REVENUE: I just want to stop living, that's all.
LUKE: Well, yu must have a reason.
REVENUE: No special reason—I find life dull and I'd like to get out of it.
LUKE: Dull?
REVENUE: Yes—I hate to go to bed—I hate to get up—I don't care for food—I can't drink liquor—I find people either malicious or dull—I see by the fate of my acquaintances, both men and women, that love is a farce. I have seen fame and preference come to those who least deserved them, while the whole world kicked and cuffed the worthy ones. The craftiest schemer gets the most money and glory, while the fair-minded dealer is humiliated in the bankruptcy court. In the name of the law every crime is committed; in the name of religion every

vice is indulged; in the name of education greatest ignorance is rampant.

LUKE: I don't git all of that, but I reckon you're some put out.

REVENUE: I am. The world's a failure . . . what's more, it's a farce. I don't like it but I can't change it, so I'm just aching for a chance to get out of it. . . . [*Approaching* LUKE.] And you, my dear friend, are going to present me the opportunity.

LUKE: Yes, I reckon you'll get your wish now.

REVENUE: Good . . . if you only knew how I've tried to get killed.

LUKE: Well, why didn't you kill yerself?

REVENUE: I was afraid.

LUKE: Afreed o' what—hurtin' yourself?

REVENUE: No, afraid of the consequences.

LUKE: Whad d'ye mean?

REVENUE: Do you believe in another life after this one?

LUKE: I kan't say ez I ever give it much thought.

REVENUE: Well, don't—because if you do you'll never kill another Crosby . . . not even a revenue officer.

LUKE: Tain't that bad, is it?

REVENUE: Worse. Twenty times I've had a revolver to my head—crazy to die—and then as my finger pressed the trigger I'd get a terrible dread—a dread that I was plunging into worse terrors than this world ever knew. If killing were the end it would be easy, but what if it's only the beginning of something worse?

LUKE: Well you gotta take some chances.

REVENUE: I'll not take that one. You know, Mr.

Luke, life was given to us by some one who probably never intended that we should take it, and that some one has something ready for people who destroy his property. That's what frightens me.

Luke: You do too much worryin' to be a regular suicide.

Revenue: Yes, I do. That's why I changed my plan.

Luke: What plan?

Revenue: My plan for dying.

Luke: Oh, then you didn't give up the idea?

Revenue: No, indeed—I'm still determined to die, but I'm going to make some one else responsible.

Luke: Oh—so you hain't willing to pay fer yer own funeral music?

Revenue: No, sir—I'll furnish the passenger, but some one else must buy the ticket. You see, when I finally decided I'd be killed I immediately exposed myself to every danger I knew.

Luke: How?

Revenue: In a thousand ways. . . . [*Pause.*] Did you ever see an automobile?

Luke: No.

Revenue: They go faster than steam engines, and they don't *stay* on tracks. Did you ever hear of Fifth Avenue, New York?

Luke: No.

Revenue: Fifth Avenue is jammed with automobiles, eight deep all day long. People being killed every day. I crossed Fifth Avenue a thousand times a day, every day for weeks, never once trying to get out of the way, and always praying I'd be hit.

Luke: And couldn't yu git hit?

REVENUE [*in disgust*]: No. Automobiles only hit people who try to get out of the way. [*Pause.*] When that failed I frequented the lowest dives on the Bowery, flashing a roll of money and wearing diamonds, hoping they'd kill me for them. They stole the money and diamonds, but never touched me.
LUKE: Couldn't you pick a fight?
REVENUE: I'm coming to that. You know up North they believe that a man can be killed in the South for calling another man a liar.
LUKE: That's right.
REVENUE: It is, is it? Well, I've called men liars from Washington to Atlanta, and I'm here to tell you about it.
LUKE: They must a took pity on ye.
REVENUE: Do you know Two Gun Jake that keeps the dive down in Henderson.
LUKE: I should think I do. . . . Jake's killed enough of 'em.
REVENUE: He's a bad man, ain't he?
LUKE: He's no trifler.
REVENUE: I wound up in Jake's place two nights ago, pretending to be drunk. Jake was cursing niggers.
LUKE: He's allus doin' that.
REVENUE: So I elbowed my way up to the bar and announced that I was an expert in the discovery of nigger blood . . . could tell a nigger who was 63-64ths white.
LUKE: Ye kin?
REVENUE: No, I can't, but I made them believe it. I then offered to look them over and tell them if they had any nigger blood in them. A few of them

sneaked away, but the rest stood for it. I passed them all until I got to Two Gun Jake. I examined his eyeballs, looked at his finger-nails, and said, "You're a nigger."

LUKE: An' what did Jake do?

REVENUE: He turned pale, took me into the back room, he said: "Honest to God, Mister, can ye see nigger blood in me?" I said: "Yes." "There's no mistake about it?" "Not a bit," I answered. "Good God," he said, "I always suspected it." Then he pulled out his gun. . . .

LUKE: Eh . . . eh?

REVENUE: And shot *himself.*

LUKE: Jake shot hisself! . . . is he dead?

REVENUE: I don't know—I was too disgusted to wait. I wandered around until I thought of you moonshiners . . . scrambled around in the mountains until I found your still. I *sat* on it and waited until you boys showed up, and here I am, and you're going to kill me.

LUKE [*pause*]: Ah, so ye want us to do yer killin' fer ye, do ye?

REVENUE: You're my last hope. If I fail this time I may as well give it up.

LUKE [*takes out revolver, turns sidewise and secretly removes cartridges from chamber. Rises*]: What wuz that noise? [*Lays revolver on table and steps outside of door.* REVENUE *looks at revolver apparently without interest.* LUKE *cautiously enters doorway and expresses surprise at seeing* REVENUE *making no attempt to secure revolver. Feigning excitement, goes to table, picks up gun.*] I reckon

I'm gettin' careless, leavin' a gun layin' around here that-a-way. Didn't you see it?

REVENUE: Yes.

LUKE: Well, why didn't ye grab it?

REVENUE: What for?

LUKE: To git the drop on me.

REVENUE: Can't you understand what I've been telling you, Mister? I don't *want* the drop on you.

LUKE: Well, doggone if I don't believe yer tellin' me the truth. Thought I'd just see what ye'd do. Ye see I emptied it first.

[*Opens up gun.*]

REVENUE: That wasn't necessary.

LUKE: Well, I reckon ye better git along out o' here, Mister.

REVENUE: You don't mean you're weakening?

LUKE: I ain't got no call to do your killin' fer you. If ye hain't sport enough to do it yerself, I reckon ye kin go on sufferin'.

REVENUE: But I told you why I don't want to do it. One murder more or less means nothing to you. You don't care anything about the hereafter.

LUKE: Mebbe I don't, but there ain't no use my takin' any more chances than I have to. And what's more, Mister, from what you been tellin' me I reckon there's a charm on you, and I ain't goin' to take no chances goin' agin charms.

REVENUE: So *you're* going to go back on me?

LUKE: Yes, sirree.

REVENUE: Well, maybe some of the other boys will be willing. I'll wait till they come.

LUKE: The other boys ain't goin' to see you. You're a leavin' this yer place right now—now! It won't

do no good. You may as well go peaceable, ye ain't got no right to expect us to bear yer burdens.

REVENUE: Damn it all! I've spoiled it again.

LUKE: I reckon you better make up yer mind to go on livin'.

REVENUE: That looks like the only way out.

LUKE: Come on, I'll let you ride my horse to town. It's the only one we got, so yu can leave it at Two Gun Jake's, and one o' the boys'll go git it, or I reckon I'll go over myself and see if Jake made a job of it.

REVENUE: I suppose it's no use arguing with you.

LUKE: Not a bit. Come on, you.

REVENUE: Well, I'd like to leave my address so if you ever come to New York you can look me up.

LUKE: 'Tain't likely I'll ever come to New York.

REVENUE: Well, I'll leave it, anyhow. Have you a piece of paper?

LUKE: Paper what you write on? Never had none, Mister.

REVENUE [*looking about room, sees* JIM DUNN'S *picture on wall, goes to it, takes it down*]: If you don't mind, I'll put it on the back of Jim Dunn's picture. [*Placing picture on table, begins to print.*] I'll print it for you, so it'll be easy to read. My address is here, so if you change your mind you can send for me.

LUKE: 'Tain't likely—come on. [*Both go to doorway*—LUKE *extends hand,* REVENUE *takes it.*] Good-by, Mister—cheer up . . . there's the horse.

REVENUE: Good-by.

[*Shaking* LUKE'S *hand.*]

LUKE: Don't be so glum, Mister. Lemme hear

you laff jist onct before yu go. [REVENUE *begins to laugh weakly.*] Aw, come on, laff out with it hearty. [REVENUE *laughs louder.*] Heartier yit. [REVENUE *is now shouting his laughter, and is heard laughing until hoof beats of his horse die down in the distance.* [LUKE *watches for a moment, then returns to table—takes a drink—picks up picture—turns it around several times before getting it right—then begins to study. In attempting to make out the name he slowly traces in the air with his index finger a capital "J"—then mutters "J-J-J," then describes a letter "I"—mutters "I-I-I," then a letter "M"—muttering "M-M-M, J-I-M—J-I-M—JIM." In the same way describes and mutters D-U-N-N.*] Jim Dunn! By God! [*He rushes to corner, grabs shotgun, runs to doorway, raises gun in direction stranger has gone—looks intently—then slowly lets gun fall to his side, and scans the distance with his hand shadowing his eyes—steps inside—slowly puts gun in corner—seats himself at table.*] Jim Dunn!—and he begged me to kill 'im!!

CURTAIN

THE DREAMY KID

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THE DREAMY KID

by

EUGENE O'NEILL

CHARACTERS

MAMMY SAUNDERS
ABE, her grandson, "The Dreamy Kid"
CEELY ANN
IRENE

TIME: *Nightfall of a day in early winter.*
PLACE: MAMMY SAUNDERS' *bedroom in a house just off of Carmine Street, New York.*

SCENE: *The left of the room, forward, is taken up by a heavy, old-fashioned wooden bedstead with a feather mattress. A gaudy red-and-yellow quilt covers the other bedclothes. In back of the bed, a chest of drawers placed against the left wall. On top of the chest, a small lamp. A rocking-chair stands beside the head of the bed on the right. In the rear wall, toward the right, a low window with ragged white curtains. In the right corner, a washstand with bowl and pitcher. Bottles of medicine, a spoon, a glass, etc., are also on the stand. Farther forward, a door opening on the hall and stairway.*
The room is in shadowy half darkness, the

only light being a pale glow that seeps through the window from the arc lamp on the nearby corner, and by which the objects in the room can be dimly discerned. The vague outlines of MAMMY SAUNDERS' *figure lying in the bed can be seen, and her black face stands out in sharp contrast from the pillows that support her head.*

MAMMY SAUNDERS [*weakly*]: Ceely Ann! [*With faint querulousness.*] Light de lamp, will you? Hit's mighty dark in yere. [*After a slight pause.*] Ain't you dar, Ceely Ann? [*Receiving no reply she sighs deeply and her limbs move uneasily under the bedclothes. The door is opened and shut and the stooping form of another colored woman appears in the semi-darkness. She goes to the foot of the bed sobbing softly, and stands there evidently making an effort to control her emotion.*] Dat you, Ceely Ann?

CEELY [*huskily*]: Hit ain't no yuther, Mammy.

MAMMY: Light de lamp, den. I can't see nowhars.

CEELY: Des one second till I finds a match. [*She wipes her eyes with her handkerchief—then goes to the chest of drawers and feels around on the top of it—pretending to grumble.*] Hit beat all how dem pesky little sticks done hide umse'fs. Shoo! Yere dey is. [*She fumbles with the lamp.*]

MAMMY [*suspiciously*]: You ain't been cryin', is you?

CEELY [*with feigned astonishment*]: Cryin'? I 'clar' ter goodness you does git the mos' fool notions lyin' dar.

MAMMY [*in a tone of relief*]: I mos' thought I yeard you.

CEELY [*lighting the lamp*]: 'Deed you ain't.

[*The two women are revealed by the light.* MAMMY SAUNDERS *is an old, white-haired negress about ninety with a weazened face furrowed by wrinkles and withered by old age and sickness.* CEELY *is a stout woman of fifty or so with gray hair and a round, fat face. She wears a loose-fitting gingham dress and a shawl thrown over her head.*]

CEELY [*with attempted cheerfulness*]: Bless yo' soul, I ain't got nothin' to cry 'bout. Yere. Lemme fix you so you'll rest mo' easy. [*She lifts the old woman gently and fixes the pillows.*] Dere. Now ain't you feelin' better?

MAMMY [*dully*]: My strenk don' all went. I can't lift a hand.

CEELY [*hurriedly*]: Dat'll all come back ter you de doctor tole me des now when I goes down to de door with him. [*Glibly.*] He say you is de mos' strongest 'oman fo' yo' years ever he sees in de worl'; and he tell me you gwine ter be up and walkin' ag'in fo' de week's out. [*As she finds the old woman's eyes fixed on her she turns away confusedly and abruptly changes the subject.*] Hit ain't too wo'm in dis room, dat's a fac'.

MAMMY [*shaking her head—in a half whisper*]: No, Ceely Ann. Hit ain't no use'n you tellin' me nothin' but de trufe. I feels mighty poo'ly. En I knows hit's on'y wid de blessin' er God I kin las' de night out.

CEELY [*distractedly*]: Ain't no sich a thing! Hush yo' noise, Mammy!

MAMMY [*as if she hadn't heard—in a crooning sing-song*]: I'se gwine soon fum dis wicked yearth—and may de Lawd have mercy on dis po' ole sinner. [*After a pause—anxiously.*] All I'se prayin' fer is dat God don't take me befo' I sees Dreamy ag'in. Whar's Dreamy, Ceely Ann? Why ain't he come yere? Ain't you done sent him word I'se sick like I tole you?

CEELY: I tole dem boys ter tell him speshul, and dey swar dey would soon's dey find him. I s'pose dey ain't kotch him yit. Don't you pester yo'se'f worryin'. Dreamy'll come fo' ve'y long.

MAMMY [*after a pause—weakly*]: Dere's a feelin' in my haid like I was afloatin' yander whar I can't see nothin', or 'member nothin', or know de sight er any pusson I knows; en I wants ter see Dreamy ag'in befo'—

CEELY [*quickly*]: Don' waste yo' strenk talkin'. You git a wink er sleep en I wake you when he comes, you heah me?

MAMMY [*faintly*]: I does feel mighty drowsy.

[*She closes her eyes.* CEELY *goes over to the window and pulling the curtains aside, stands looking down into the street as if she were watching for some one coming. A moment later there is a noise of footfalls from the stairs in the hall, followed by a sharp rap on the door.*]

CEELY [*turning quickly from the window*]: Ssshh! Ssshh!

[*She hurries to the door, glancing anxiously*

toward MAMMY. *The old woman appears to have fallen asleep.* CEELY *cautiously opens the door a bare inch or so and peeks out. When she sees who it is she immediately tries to slam it shut again but a vigorous shove from the outside forces her back and* IRENE *pushes her way defiantly into the room. She is a young, good-looking negress, highly rouged and powdered, dressed in gaudy, cheap finery.*]

IRENE [*in a harsh voice—evidently worked up to a great state of nervous excitement*]: No, you don't, Ceely Ann! I said I was comin' here and it'll take mo'n you to stop me!

CEELY [*almost speechless with horrified indignation—breathing heavily*]: Yo' bad 'oman! Git back ter yo' bad-house whar yo' b'longs!

IRENE [*raising her clenched hand—furiously*]: Stop dat talkin' to me, nigger, or I'll split yo' fool head! [*As* CEELY *shrinks away* IRENE *lowers her hand and glances quickly around the room.*] Whar's Dreamy?

CEELY [*scornfully*]: Yo' axe me dat! Whar's Dreamy? Axe yo'se'f. Yo's de one ought ter know whar he is.

IRENE: Den he ain't come here?

CEELY: I ain't tellin' de likes er you wedder he is or not.

IRENE [*pleadingly*]: Tell me, Ceely Ann, ain't he been here? He'd be sure to come here 'count of Mammy dyin', dey said.

CEELY [*pointing to* MAMMY—*apprehensively*]: Ssshh! [*Then lowering her voice to a whisper—suspiciously.*] Dey said? Who said?

IRENE [*equally suspicious*]: None o' your business who said. [*Then pleading again.*] Ceely Ann, I jest got ter see him dis minute, dis secon'! He's in bad, Dreamy is, and I knows somep'n I gotter tell him, somep'n I jest heard—

CEELY [*uncomprehendingly*]: In bad? What you jest heah?

IRENE: I ain't tellin' no one but him. [*Desperately.*] For Gawd's sake, tell me whar he is, Ceely!

CEELY: I don' know no mo'n you.

IRENE [*fiercely*]: You's lyin', Ceely! You's lyin' ter me jest 'cause I'se bad.

CEELY: De good Lawd bar witness I'se tellin' you de trufe!

IRENE [*hopelessly*]: Den I gotter go find him, high and low, somewheres. [*Proudly.*] You ain't got de right not ter trust me, Ceely, where de Dreamy's mixed in it. I'd go ter hell for Dreamy!

CEELY [*indignantly*]: Hush yo' wicked cussin'! [*Then anxiously.*] Is Dreamy in trouble?

IRENE [*with a scornful laugh*]: Trouble? Good Lawd, it's worser'n dat! [*Then in surprise.*] Ain't you heerd what de Dreamy done last night, Ceely?

CEELY [*apprehensively*]: What de Dreamy do? Tell me, gal. Somep'n bad?

IRENE [*with the same scornful laugh*]: Bad? Worser'n bad, what he done!

CEELY [*lamenting querulously*]: Oh good Lawd, I knowed it! I knowed with all his carryin's-on wid dat passel er tough young niggers—him so uppity 'cause he's de boss er de gang—sleepin' all de day 'stead er workin' an Lawd knows what he does in de nights—fightin' wid white folks, an' totin' a pistol

in his pocket—[*with a glance of angry resentment at* IRENE]—an' as do' de udder company he's been keepin'—

IRENE [*fiercely*]: Shut your mouth, Ceely! Dat ain't your business.

CEELY: Oh, I knowed Dreamy'd be gittin' in trouble fo' long! De lowflung young trash! An' here's his ole Mammy don' know no di'frunt but he's de mos' innercent young lamb in de worl'. [*In a strained whisper.*] What he do? Is he been stealin' somep'n?

IRENE [*angrily*]: You go ter hell Ceely Ann! You ain't no fren' of de Dreamy's, you talk dat way, and I ain't got no time ter waste argyin' wid your fool notions. [*She goes to the door.*] Dreamy go ter his death sho's yo' born. if I don't find him an' tell him quick!

CEELY [*terrified*]: Oh Lawd!

IRENE [*anxiously*]: He'll sho'ly try ter come here and see his ole Mammy befo' she dies, don't you think, Ceely?

CEELY: Fo' Gawd I hopes so! She's been a-prayin' all de day—

IRENE [*opening the door*]: You hopes so, you fool nigger! I tells you it's good-by to de Dreamy, he come here! I knows! I gotter find an' stop him. If he come here, Ceely, you tell him git out quick and hide, he don't wanter git pinched. You hear? You tell him dat, Ceely, for Gawd's sake! I'se got ter go—find him—high an' low—

[*She goes out, leaving* CEELY *staring at her in speechless indignation.*]

CEELY [*drawing a deep breath*]: Yo' street gal! I

don' b'lieve one word you says—stuffin' me wid yo' bad lies so's you kin keep de Dreamy frum leavin' you! [MAMMY SAUNDERS *awakes and groans faintly.* CEELY *hurries over to her bedside.*] Is de pain hurtin' again, Mammy?

MAMMY [*vaguely*]: Dat you, Dreamy?

CEELY: No, Mammy, dis is Ceely. Dreamy's comin' soon. Is you restin' easy?

MAMMY [*as if she hadn't heard*]: Dat you, Dreamy?

CEELY [*sitting down in the rocker by the bed and taking one of the old woman's hands in hers*]: No. Dreamy's comin'.

MAMMY [*after a pause—suddenly*]: Does vou 'member yo' dead Mammy, chile?

CEELY [*mystified*]: My dead Mammy?

MAMMY: Didn' I hear yo' talkin' jest now, Dreamy?

CEELY [*very worried*]: I clar ter goodness, she don' know me ary bit. Dis is Ceely Ann talkin' ter yo', Mammy.

MAMMY: Who was yo' talkin' wid, Dreamy?

CEELY [*shaking her head—in a trembling voice*]: Hit can't be long befo' de en'. [*In a louder tone.*] Hit was me talkin' wid a pusson fum ovah de way. She say tell you Dreamy comin' heah ter see yo' right away. You heah dat, Mammy?

[*The old woman sighs but does not answer. There is a pause.*]

MAMMY [*suddenly*]: Does yo' 'member yo' dead Mammy, chile? [*Then with a burst of religious exaltation.*] De Lawd have mercy!

CEELY [*like an echo*]: Bless de Lawd! [*Then in a frightened half-whisper to herself.*] Po' thing!

Her min's done leavin' her jest like de doctor said. [*She looks down at the old woman helplessly. The door on the right is opened stealthily and the* Dreamy Kid *slinks in on tiptoe.* Ceely, *hearing a board creak, turns quickly toward the door and gives a frightened start.*] Dreamy!

Dreamy [*puts his fingers to his lips—commandingly*]: Sshh!

[*He bends down to a crouching position and holding the door about an inch open, peers out into the hallway in an attitude of tense waiting, one hand evidently clutching some weapon in the side pocket of his coat. After a moment he is satisfied of not being followed, and, after closing the door carefully and locking it, he stands up and walks to the center of the room, casting a look of awed curiosity at the figure in the bed. He is a well-built, good looking young negro, light in color. His eyes are shifty and hard, their expression one of tough, scornful defiance. His mouth is cruel and perpetually drawn back at the corner into a snarl. He is dressed in well-fitting clothes of a flashy pattern. A light cap is pulled down on the side of his head.*]

Ceely [*coming from the bed to meet him*]: Bless de Lawd, here you is at las'!

Dreamy [*with a warning gesture*]: Nix on de loud talk! Talk low, can't yuh? [*He glances back at the door furtively—then continues with a sneer.*] Yuh're a fine nut, Ceely Ann! What for you sendin' out all ober de town for me like you was

crazy! D'yuh want ter git me in de cooler? Don' you know dey're after me for what I done last night?

CEELY [*fearfully*]: I heerd somep'n—but—what you done, Dreamy?

DREAMY [*with an attempt at a careless bravado*]: I croaked a guy, dat's what! A white man.

CEELY [*in a frightened whisper*]: What you mean croaked?

DREAMY [*boastfully*]: I shot him dead, dat's what! [*As* CEELY *shrinks away from him in horror—resentfully.*] Aw say, don' gimme none o' dem looks o' yourn. 'Twarn't my doin' nohow. He was de one lookin' for trouble. I wasn't seekin' for no mess wid him dat I could help. But he tole folks he was gwine ter git me for a fac', and dat fo'ced my hand. I had ter git him ter pertect my own life. [*With cruel satisfaction.*] And I got him right, you b'lieve me!

CEELY [*putting her hands over her face with a low moan of terror*]: May de good Lawd pardon yo' wickedness! Oh Lawd! What yo' po' ole Mammy gwine say if she hear tell—an' she never knowin' how bad you's got.

DREAMY [*fiercely*]: Hell! You ain't tole her, is you?

CEELY: Think I want ter kill her on the instant? An' I didn't know myse'f—what you done—till you tells me. [*Frightenedly.*] Oh, Dreamy, what you gwine do now? How you gwine git away? [*Almost wailing.*] Good Lawd, de perlice gon' kotch you suah!

DREAMY [*savagely*]: Shut yo' loud mouth, damn yo'! [*He stands tensely listening for some sound*

from the hall. After a moment he points to the bed.] Is Mammy sleepin'?

CEELY [*tiptoes to the bed*]: Seems like she is. [*She comes back to him.*] Dat's de way wid her—sleep fo' a few minutes, den she wake, den sleep ag'in.

DREAMY [*scornfully*]: Aw, dere ain't nothin' wrong wid her 'ceptin' she's ole. What yuh wanter send de word tellin' me she's croakin', and git me comin' here at de risk o' my life, and den find her sleepin'. [*Clenching his fist threateningly.*] I gotter mind ter smash yo' face for playin' de damn fool and makin' me de goat. [*He turns toward the door.*] Ain't no us'en me stayin' here when dey'll likely come lookin' for me. I'm gwine out where I gotta chance ter make my git-away. De boys is all fixin' it up for me. [*His hand on the doorknob.*] When Mammy wakes, you tell her I couldn't wait, you hear?

CEELY [*hurrying to him and grabbing his arm—pleadingly*]: Don' yo' go now, Dreamy—not jest yit. Fo' de good Lawd's sake, don' yo' go befo' you speaks wid her! If yo' knew how she's been a-callin' an' a-prayin' for yo' all de day—

DREAMY [*scornfully but a bit uncertainly*]: Aw, she don' need none o' me. What good kin I do watchin' her do a kip? It'd be di'frunt if she was croakin' on de level.

CEELY [*in an anguished whisper*]: She's gwine wake up in a secon' an' den she call: "Dreamy. Whar's Dreamy?"—an' what I gwine tell her den? An' yo' Mammy is dyin', Dreamy, sho's fate! Her min' been wanderin' an' she don' even recernize me no mo', an' de doctor say when dat come it ain't but a

sho't time befo' de en'. Yo' gotter stay wid yo' Mammy long 'nuff ter speak wid her, Dreamy. Yo' jest gotter stay wid her in her las' secon's on dis yearth when she's callin' ter yo'. [*With conviction as he hesitates.*] Listen heah, yo' Dreamy! Yo' don' never git no bit er luck in dis worril ary ag'in, yo' leaves her now. De perlice gon' kotch yo' suah.

DREAMY [*with superstitious fear*]: Ssshh! Can dat bull, Ceely! [*Then boastfully.*] I wasn't pinin' to beat it up here, git me? De boys was all persuadin' me not ter take de chance. It's takin' my life in my hands, dat's what. But when I heerd it was ole Mammy croakin' and axin' ter see me, I says ter myse'f: "Dreamy, you gotter make good wid ole Mammy no matter what come—or you don' never git a bit of luck in yo' life no more." And I was game and come, wasn't I? Nary body in dis worril kin say de Dreamy ain't game ter de core, n'matter what. [*With sudden decision walks to the foot of the bed and stands looking down at* MAMMY. *A note of fear creeps into his voice.*] Gawd, she's quiet 'nuff. Maybe she done passed away in her sleep like de ole ones does. You go see, Ceely; an' if she's on'y sleepin', you wake her up. I wanter speak wid her quick—an' den I'll make a break outa here. You make it fast, Ceely Ann, I tells yo'.

CEELY [*bends down beside the bed*]: Mammy, Mammy! Here's de Dreamy.

MAMMY [*opens her eyes—drowsily and vaguely, in a weak voice*]: Dreamy?

DREAMY [*shuffling his feet and moving around the bed*]: Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY [*fastening her eyes on him with fascinated*

joy]: Dreamy! Hits yo'! [*Then uncertainly.*] I ain't dreamin' nor seein' ha'nts, is I?

DREAMY [*coming forward and taking her hand*]: 'Deed I ain't no ghost. Here I is, sho' nuff.

MAMMY [*clutching his right hand and pulling it down on her breast—in an ecstasy of happiness*]: Didn' I know you'd come! Didn' I say: "Dreamy ain't gwine let his ole Mammy die all lone by he'se'f an' him not dere wid her." I knows yo'd come.

[*She starts to laugh joyously, but coughs and sinks weakly.*]

DREAMY [*shudders in spite of himself as he realizes for the first time how far gone the old woman is—forcing a tone of joking reassurance*]: What's dat foolishness I hears you talkin', Mammy? Wha' d'yuh mean pullin' dat bull 'bout croakin' on me? Shoo! Tryin' ter kid me, ain't yo'? Shoo! You live ter plant de flowers on my grave, see if you don'.

MAMMY [*sadly and very weakly*]: I knows! I knows! Hit ain't long now. [*Bursting into a sudden weak hysteria.*] Yo' stay heah, Dreamy! Yo' stay heah by me, yo' stay heah—till de good Lawd take me home. Yo' promise me dat! Yo' do dat fo' po' ole Mammy, won't yo'?

DREAMY [*uneasily*]: 'Deed I will, Mammy, 'deed I will.

MAMMY [*closing her eyes with a sigh of relief—calmly*]: Bless de Lawd for dat. Den I ain't skeered no mo'.

[*She settles herself comfortably in the bed as if preparing for sleep.*]

CEELY [*in a low voice*]: I gotter go home fo' a

minute, Dreamy. I ain't been dere all de day and Lawd knows what happen. I'll be back yere befo' ve'y long.

DREAMY [*his eyes fixed on* MAMMY]: Aw right, beat it if yuh wanter. [*Turning to her—in a fierce whisper.*] On'y don' be long. I can't stay here an' take dis risk, you hear?

CEELY [*frightenedly*]: I knows, chile. I come back, I swar!

[*She goes out quietly.* DREAMY *goes quickly to the window and cautiously searches the street below with his eyes.*]

MAMMY [*uneasily*]: Dreamy [*He hurries back and takes her hand again.*] I got de mos' 'culiar feelin' in my head. Seems like de years done all roll away an' I'm back down home in de ole place whar yo' was bo'n. [*After a short pause.*] Does yo' 'member yo' own mammy, chile?

DREAMY: No.

MAMMY: Yo' was too young, I s'pec'. Yo' was on'y a baby w'en she tuck 'n' die. My Sal was a mighty fine 'oman, if I does say hit myse'f.

DREAMY [*fidgeting nervously*]: Don' you talk, Mammy. Better you'd close yo' eyes an' rest.

MAMMY [*with a trembling smile—weakly*]: Shoo! W'at is I done come ter wid my own gran' chile bossin' me 'bout. I wants ter talk. You knows you ain't give me much chance ter talk wid yo' dese las' years.

DREAMY [*sullenly*]: I ain't had de time, Mammy; but you knows I was always game ter give you anything I got. [*A note of appeal in his voice.*] You knows dat, don' you, Mammy?

MAMMY: Sho'ly I does. Yo' been a good boy, Dreamy; an' if dere's one thing more'n another makes me feel like I mighter done good in de sight er de Lawd, hits dat I raised yo' fum a baby.

DREAMY [*clearing his throat gruffly*]: Don' you talk so much, Mammy.

MAMMY [*querulously*]: I gotter talk, chile. Come times—w'en I git thinkin' yere in de bed—w'at's gwine ter come ter me a'mos' b'fore I knows hit—like de thief in de night—en den I gits skeered. But w'en I talks wid yo' I ain't skeered a bit.

DREAMY [*defiantly*]: You ain't got nothin' to be skeered of—not when de Dreamy's here.

MAMMY [*after a slight pause, faintly*]: Dere's a singin' in my ears all de time. [*Seized by a sudden religious ecstasy.*] Maybe hits de singin' hymns o' de blessed angels I done heah fum above. [*Wildly.*] Bless Gawd! Bless Gawd! Pity dis po' ole sinner!

DREAMY [*with an uneasy glance at the door*]: Ssshh, Mammy! Don' shout so loud.

MAMMY: De pictures keep a whizzin' fo' my eyes like de thread in a sewing machine. Seems 's'if all my life done fly back ter me all ter once. [*With a flickering smile—weakly.*] Does you know how yo' come by dat nickname dey all calls yo'—de Dreamy? Is I ever tole yo' dat?

DREAMY [*evidently lying*]: No, Mammy.

MAMMY: Hit was one mawnin' b'fo' we come No'th. Me an' yo' mammy—yo' was des a baby in arms den—

DREAMY [*hears a noise from the hall*]: Ssshh, Mammy! For God's sake, don't speak for a minute. I hears somep'n.

[*He stares at the door, his face hardening savagely, and listens intently.*]

MAMMY [*in a frightened tone*]: W'at's de matter, chile?

DREAMY: Ssshh! Somebody comin'. [*A noise of footsteps comes from the hall stairway.* DREAMY *springs to his feet.*] Leggo my hand, Mammy—jest for a secon'. I come right back to you.

[*He pulls his hand from the old woman's grip. She falls back on the pillows moaning.* DREAMY *pulls a large automatic revolver from his coat pocket and tiptoes quickly to the door. As he does so there is a sharp rap. He stands listening at the crack for a moment, then noiselessly turns the key, unlocking the door. Then he crouches low down by the wall so that the door, when opened, will hide him from the sight of any one entering. There is another and louder rap on the door.*]

MAMMY [*groaning*]: W'at's dat, Dreamy? Whar is yo'?

DREAMY: Ssshh! [*Then muffling his voice he calls*]: Come in.

[*He raises the revolver in his hand. The door is pushed open and* IRENE *enters, her eyes peering wildly about the room. Her bosom is heaving as if she had been running and she is trembling all over with terrified excitement.*]

IRENE [*not seeing him calls out questioningly*]: Dreamy?

DREAMY [*lowering his revolver and rising to his feet roughly*]: Close dat door!

IRENE [*whirling about with a startled cry*]: Dreamy!

DREAMY [*shutting the door and locking it—aggressively*]: Shut yo' big mouth, gal, or I'll bang it shut for you! You wanter let de whole block know where I is?

IRENE [*hysterical with joy—trying to put her arms around him*]: Bless God, I foun' you at last!

DREAMY [*pushing her away roughly*]: Leggo o' me! Why you come here follerin' me? Ain't yo' got 'nuff sense in yo' fool head ter know de bulls is liable ter shadow you when dey knows you's my gal? Is you pinin' ter git me kotched an' sent to de chair?

IRENE [*terrified*]: No, no!

DREAMY [*savagely*]: I gotter mind ter hand you one you won't ferget! [*He draws back his fist.*]

IRENE [*shrinking away*]: Don' you hit me, Dreamy! Don' you beat me up now! Jest lemme 'xplain, dat's all.

MAMMY [*in a frightened whimper*]: Dreamy! Come yere to me. Whar is yo'? I'se skeered!

DREAMY [*in a fierce whisper to* IRENE]: Can dat bull or I'll fix you. [*He hurries to the old woman and pats her hand.*] Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY: Who dat yo's a-talkin' wid?

DREAMY: On'y a fren' o' Ceely Ann's, Mammy, askin' where she is. I gotter talk wid her some mo' yit. You sleep, Mammy. [*He goes to* IRENE.]

MAMMY [*feebly*]: Don' yo' leave me, Dreamy.

DREAMY: I'se right here wid you. [*Fiercely to* IRENE.] You git the hell outa here, you Reeny,

you heah—quick! Dis ain't no place for de like o' you wid ole Mammy dyin'!

IRENE [*with a horrified glance at the bed*]: Is she dyin'—honest?

DREAMY: Ssshh! She's croakin', I tells yo'—an' I gotter stay wid her fo' a while—an' I ain't got no time ter be pesterin' wid you. Beat it, now! Beat it outa here befo' I knocks yo' cold, git me?

IRENE: Jest wait a secon', for de love o' Gawd. I got somep'n ter tell you—

DREAMY: I don' wanter hear yo' fool talk. [*He gives her a push toward the door.*] Git outa dis, you hear me?

IRENE: I'll go. I'm going soon—soon's ever I've had my say. Lissen, Dreamy! It's about de coppers I come ter tell you.

DREAMY [*quickly*]: Why don' you say dat befo'? What you know, gal?

IRENE: Just befo' I come here to find you de first time, de Madam sends me out to Murphy's ter git her a bottle o' gin. I goes in de side door but I ain't rung de bell yet. I hear yo' name spoken an' I stops ter lissen. Dey was three or four men in de back room. Dey don't hear me open de outside door, an' dey can't see me, course. It was Big Sullivan from de Central Office talkin'. He was talkin' 'bout de killin' you done last night and he tells dem odders he's heerd 'bout de ole woman gittin' so sick, and dat if dey don't fin' you none of de udder places dey's lookin', dey's goin' wait for you here. Dey s'pecs you come here say good-bye to Mammy befo' you make yo' getaway.

DREAMY: It's aw right den. Dey ain't come yit.

Twister Smith done tole me de coast was clear befo' I come here.

IRENE: Dat was den. It ain't now.

DREAMY [*excitedly*]: What you mean, gal?

IRENE: I was comin' in by de front way when I sees some pusson hidin' in de doorway 'cross de street. I gits a good peek at at him and when I does—it's a copper, Dreamy, suah's yo' born, in his plain clo'es, and he's a watchin' de door o' dis house like a cat.

DREAMY [*goes to the window and stealthily crouching by the dark side peeks out. One glance is enough. He comes quickly back to* IRENE]: You got de right dope, gal. It's dat Mickey. I knows him even in de dark. Dey're waitin'—so dey ain't wise I'm here yit, dat's suah.

IRENE: But dey'll git wise befo' long.

DREAMY: He don't pipe you comin' in here?

IRENE: I skulked roun' and sneaked in by de back way froo de yard. Dey ain't none o' dem dar yit. [*Raising her voice—excitedly.*] But dere will be soon. Dey're boun' to git wise to dat back door. You ain't got no time to lose, Dreamy. Come on wid me now. Git back where yo' safe. It's de cooler for you certain if you stays here. Dey'll git you like a rat in de trap. [*As* DREAMY *hesitates.*] For de love of Gawd, Dreamy, wake up to you'se'f!

DREAMY [*uncertainly*]: I can't beat it—wid Mammy here alone. My luck done turn bad all my life, if I does.

IRENE [*fiercely*]: What good's you gittin' pinched and sent to de chair gwine do her? Is you crazy mad? Come away wid me, I tells you!

DREAMY [*half-persuaded—hesitatingly*]: I gotter speak wid her. You wait a secon'.

IRENE [*wringing her hands*]: Dis ain't no time now for fussin' wid her.

DREAMY [*gruffly*]: Shut up! [*He makes a motion for her to remain where she is and goes over to the bed—in a low voice.*] Mammy.

MAMMY [*hazily*]: Dat you, Dreamy?

[*She tries to reach out her hand and touch him.*]

DREAMY: I'm gwine leave you—jest for a moment, Mammy. I'll send de word for Ceely Ann—

MAMMY [*wide awake in an instant—with intense alarm*]: Don' yo' do dat! Don' yo' move one step out er yere or yo'll be sorry, Dreamy.

DREAMY [*apprehensively*]: I gotter go, I tells you. I'll come back.

MAMMY [*with wild grief*]: O good Lawd! W'en I's drawin' de las' bre'fs in dis po' ole body—[*Frenziedly*]—De Lawd have mercy! Good Lawd have mercy!

DREAMY [*fearfully*]: Stop dat racket, Mammy! You bring all o' dem down on my head! [*He rushes over and crouches by the window again to peer out—in relieved tones.*] He ain't heerd nothin'. He's dar yit.

IRENE [*imploring*]: Come on, Dreamy!

[*Mammy groans with pain.*]

DREAMY [*hurrying to the bed*]: What's de matter, Mammy?

IRENE [*stamping her foot*]: Dreamy! Fo' Gawd's sake!

MAMMY: Lawd have mercy! [*She groans.*] Gimme

yo' han', chile. Yo' ain't gwine leave me now, Dreamy? Yo' ain't, is yo'? Yo' ole Mammy won't bodder yo' long. Yo' know w'at yo' promise me, Dreamy! Yo' promise yo' sacred word yo' stay wid me till de en'. [*With an air of sombre prophecy—slowly.*] If yo' leave me now, yo' ain't gwine git no bit er luck s'long's yo' live, I tells yo' dat!

DREAMY [*frightened—pleadingly*]: Don' you say dat, Mammy!

IRENE: Come on, Dreamy!

DREAMY [*slowly*]: I can't. [*In awed tones.*] Don' you hear de curse she puts on me if I does?

MAMMY [*her voice trembling with weak tears*]: Don' go, chile!

DREAMY [*hastily*]: I won't leave dis room, I swar ter you! [*Relieved by the finality in his tones, the old woman sighs and closes her eyes.* DREAMY *frees his hand from hers and goes to* IRENE. *He speaks with a strange calm.*] De game's up, gal. You better beat it while de goin's good.

IRENE [*aghast*]: You gwine stay?

DREAMY: I gotter, gal. I ain't gwine agin her dyin' curse. No, suh!

IRENE [*pitifully*]: But dey'll git you suah!

DREAMY [*slapping the gun in his pocket significantly*]: Dey'll have some gittin'. I git some o' dem fust. [*With gloomy determination.*] Dey don' git dis chicken alive! Lawd Jesus, no suh. Not de Dreamy!

IRENE [*helplessly*]: Oh Lawdy, Lawdy! [*She goes to the window—with a short cry.*] He's talkin' wid someone. Dere's two o' dem.

[DREAMY *hurries to her side.*]

DREAMY: I knows him—de udder. It's Big Sullivan. [*Pulling her away roughly.*] Come out o' dat! Dey'll see you. [*He pushes her toward the door.*] Dey won't wait down dere much longer. Dey'll be comin' up here soon. [*Prayerfully, with a glance at the bed.*] I hopes she's croaked by den, fo' Christ I does!

IRENE [*as if she couldn't believe it*]: Den you ain't gwine save youse'f while dere's time? [*Pleadingly.*] Oh, Dreamy, you can make it yet!

DREAMY: De game's up, I tole you. [*With gloomy fatalism.*] I s'pect it hatter be. Yes, suh. Dey'd git me in de long run anyway—and wid her curse de luck'd be agin me. [*With sudden anger.*] Git outa here, you Reeny! You ain't aimin' ter get shot up too, is you? Ain't no sense in dat.

IRENE [*fiercely*]: I'se stayin' too, here wid you!

DREAMY: No, you isn't! None o' dat bull! You ain't got no mix in dis jam.

IRENE: Yes, I is! Ain't you my man?

DREAMY: Don' make no dif. I don' wanter git you in Dutch more'n you is. It's bad 'nuff fo' me. [*He pushes her toward the door.*] Blow while you kin, I tells you!

IRENE [*resisting him*]: No, Dreamy! What I care if dey kills me? I'se gwine stick wid you.

DREAMY [*gives her another push*]: No, you isn't, gal. [*Unlocking the door—relentlessly.*] Out wid you!

IRENE [*hysterically*]: You can't gimme no bum's rush. I'se gwine stay.

DREAMY [*gloomily*]: On'y one thing fo' me ter do den. [*He hits her on the side of the face with all*

his might, knocking her back against the wall where she sways as if about to fall. Then he opens the door and grabs her two arms from behind.] Out wid you, gal!

IRENE [*moaning*]: Dreamy! Dreamy! Lemme stay wid you! [*He pushes her into the hallway and holds her there at arm's length.*] Fo' Gawd's sake, Dreamy!

MAMMY [*whimperingly*]: Dreamy, I'se skeered!

IRENE [*from the hall*]: I'se gwine stay right here at de door. You might s'well lemme in.

DREAMY [*frowning*]: Don' do dat, Reeny. [*Then with a sudden idea.*] You run roun' an tel de gang what's up. Maybe dey git me outa dis, you hear?

IRENE [*with eager hope*]: You think dey kin?

DREAMY: Never kin tell. You hurry—through de back yard, 'member—an' don' git pinched, now.

IRENE [*eagerly*]: I'm gwine! I'll bring dem back!

DREAMY [*stands listening to her retreating footsteps—then shuts and locks the door—gloomily to himself*]: Ain't no good. Dey dassent do nothin'—but I hatter git her outa dis somehow.

MAMMY [*groaning*]: Dreamy!

DREAMY: Here I is. Jest a secon'.

[*He goes to the window.*]

MAMMY [*weakly*]: I feels—like—de en's comin'. Oh Lawd, Lawd!

DREAMY [*absent-mindedly*]: Yes, Mammy. [*Aloud to himself.*] Dey're sneakin' 'cross de street. Dere's anudder of 'em. Dat's tree.

[*He glances around the room quickly—then hurries over and takes hold of the chest of*

drawers. As he does so the old woman commences to croon shrilly to herself.]

DREAMY: Stop dat noise, Mammy. Stop dat noise!

MAMMY [*wanderingly*]: Dat's how come yo' got dat—dat nickname—Dreamy.

DREAMY: Yes, Mammy.

[*He puts the lamp on the floor to the rear of the door, turning it down low. Then he carries the chest of drawers over and places it against the door as a barricade.*]

MAMMY [*rambling as he does this—very feebly*]: Does yo' know—I gives you dat name—w'en yo's des a baby—lyin' in my arms—

DREAMY: Yes, Mammy.

MAMMY: Down by de crik—under de ole willow—whar I uster take yo'—wid yo' big eyes a-chasin'—de sun flitterin' froo de grass—an' out on de water—

DREAMY [*takes the revolver from his pocket and puts it on top of the chest of drawers*]: Dey don' git de Dreamy alive—not for de chair! Lawd Jesus, no suh!

MAMMY: An' yo' was always—a-lookin'—an' a-thinkin' ter yo'se'f—an' yo' big eyes jest a-dreamin' an' a-dreamin'—an' dat's w'en I gives yo' dat nickname—Dreamy—Dreamy—

DREAMY: Yes, Mammy. [*He listens at the crack of the door—in a tense whisper.*] I don' hear dem—but dey're comin' sneakin' up de stairs, I know it.

MAMMY [*faintly*]: Whar is yo', Dreamy? I can't—ha'dly—breathe—no mo'. Oh Lawd, have mercy!

DREAMY [*goes over to the bed*]: Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY [*speaking with difficulty*]: Yo'—kneel down—chile—say a pray'r—Oh Lawd!

DREAMY: Jest a secon', Mammy.

[*He goes over and gets his revolver and comes back.*]

MAMMY: Gimme—yo' hand—chile. [DREAMY *gives her his left hand. The revolver is in his right. He stares nervously at the door.*] An' yo' kneel down—pray fo' me. [DREAMY *gets on one knee beside the bed. There is a sound from the hallway as if some one had made a misstep on the stairs—then silence.* DREAMY *starts and half aims his gun in the direction of the door.* MAMMY *groans weakly.*] I'm dyin', chile. Hit's de en'. You pray for me—out loud—so's I can heah. Oh Lawd!

[*She gasps to catch her breath.*]

DREAMY [*abstractedly, not having heard a word she has said*]: Yes, Mammy. [*Aloud to himself with an air of grim determination as if he were making a pledge.*] Dey don't git de Dreamy! Not while he's 'live! Lawd Jesus, no suh!

MAMMY [*falteringly*]: Dat's right—yo' pray—Lawd Jesus—Lawd Jesus—

[*There is another slight sound of movement from the hallway.*]

CURTAIN

BUMBLEPUPPY

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BUMBLEPUPPY

by

John William Rogers, Jr.

CHARACTERS

Andrew Bugg,
Hamlet Prinnel,
Gentry Davenport,

Time: *The present.*

Place: *A small clump of shade trees not far from the Prinnel farmhouse in one of the older states of the South*

Scene: *Between two tree trunks, which are on the left, is hung an ancient and ragged hammock. Against a third trunk, which is to the right, an old cane-bottomed chair leans propped on its two hind legs. In the center of the stage, at a carefully measured distance between the chair and the hammock, stands a weather-stained table on which have been placed—obviously with further regard as to equi-distance—two lumps of sugar. A second chair stands somewhere back of the table.*

Beyond the immediate shade of the three trees, there is every evidence of the glare

and heat of a sweltering mid-afternoon in July.

ANDREW BUGG, *an elongated, somewhat ancient individual, is discovered leaning back in the chair, which is against the tree, a large palm leaf fan in his hand. He is thoroughly rural looking and coatless and collarless. His trousers are held up by a venerable pair of suspenders and his shirt is the worse for at least two days' perspiration and dusty roads. It being Wednesday, a three-day growth of beard is on his face. On the ground beside him lie his large straw hat and an empty mail pouch.*

Opposite ANDREW *in the hammock sprawls* HAMLET PRINNEL *in faded overalls and a blue shirt. His legs dangle lazily down and he also holds a palm leaf fan.* HAMLET, *who at nineteen is a good-natured, somewhat appealing youth, will be a shambling, colorless, middle-aged farmer at thirty, unless something quite unexpected happens to him. As the curtain rises, somewhere in the foliage a locust is droning his hot-weather zuree-zuree-zuree-z-z, and both men seem just on the point of being overcome by the languor of the afternoon, when* HAMLET, *using a minimum of effort, lifts his head enough to regard the lump of sugar nearest him. He yawns and speaks disgustedly.*

HAMLET: Them flies ain't never comin'.

ANDREW: Give 'em time. Give 'em time.

HAMLET [*sinking back into the hammock*]: 'Tain't hardly worth fifty cents to keep awake so long.

ANDREW [*Scornfully*]: I never did think you had no sportin' blood in you.

HAMLET: Oh, I'll keep awake all right . . . . You watch your own lump er sugar.

ANDREW: I'm a watchin' it. I'm a watchin' it. [*As if to prove it, he fans his sugar with a long sweep of his palm leaf.*] I wus a bumblepuppy champeen 'fore you wuz taller'n a hog's back.

HAMLET: Bumblepuppy air a funny game.

ANDREW [*a little sensitive*]: What air funny about it?

HAMLET: Folks a settin' waitin' for flies to come and light on two lumps of sugar.

ANDREW [*dryly*]: Ain't no funnier than folks just a *settin'*, I reckon, and a heap er folks I knows does a lot er that.

HAMLET: Yeah. Settin' do seem to be popular.

ANDREW: Playin' bumblepuppy, you can't never tell when you might win fifty cents. [*Scornfully.*] You can set all day and all you'll do is wear out the seat er your pants.

HAMLET [*yawns*]: Uh-huh.

[HAMLET *drowses, lying on his back. Somewhere in the branches above, the locust begins his song again and is answered by another in the distance.* ANDREW *looks out into the burning glare and mops his face with a large grimy handkerchief.*]

ANDREW [*sighing deeply*]: Whoopee. It's hotter 'n Mis Pharaoh's cook-stove. [*He is just about to settle back in his chair when he notices something*

flying over the table. He becomes alert, looks quickly at HAMLET *to make sure he is drowsing and uses his fan very gently to drive the quarry from his own sugar toward* HAMLET'S. *On his face is written that beatific consciousness of being alive which comes to sportsmen in supreme moments of the chase. His movements are convulsive with excitement. He looks over at* HAMLET, *then stands up, pointing at the latter's lump of sugar, shouting triumphantly.*] He's done lit on your sugar first. Gimme your fifty cents.

[HAMLET, *startled by* ANDREW, *almost falls out of the hammock. Then, after an examination of his sugar, he turns away with deliberate disgust and starts getting back into the hammock again.*]

HAMLET: Shucks, 'tain't nothing but a gnat. [*Scowling at* ANDREW]. Gnats don't count. Shoo. Shoo. [*He drives the insect away with his fan.*] What you want to get a feller out fer nothin' fer?

ANDREW [*cheerfully, settling back in his chair*]: I ain't seen you move so fast since a hen had teeth. . . . Say, Ham, if a snail in a well thirty feet deep crawls up three feet every day and falls back two feet every night, how long will it take that snail to—

HAMLET [*appalled at the effort involved*]: Aw come on, Mr. Bugg, this ain't weather fer brain work. [*With admiration.*] You always *was* a bird dog, though, fer that there higher mathymatics.

ANDREW [*modestly*]: Well, mental arithmetic is just kinder my natural recreation, same as some folks likes to set and look through a Sears-Roebuck catalogue.

[ANDREW'*s attention is suddenly attracted by*

something off stage to the right. HAMLET *sees him looking at something.*]

HAMLET: What's the matter?

ANDREW [*looking*]: Folks a stoppin' at your front gate. You're a goin' ter have company.

HAMLET [*lying back in the hammock comfortably and stretching his arms*]: I ain't. Comin' to see mom, I reckon. [*Making a slight effort to see without taking the trouble really to raise himself up.*] Who is it? I can't see.

ANDREW [*still looking*]: Looks like Maria Abernathy's Ford. . . . They're a gittin' out all right. [*Impressed.*] She's got Gentry Davenport with her.

HAMLET: Gentry Davenport! [*Interested, he sits up suddenly and looks.*] Yeah, that's him. He come to see mama last week, the day after he got here. . . . They both busted out cryin' as soon as they had a good look at each other.

ANDREW: Cryin'?

HAMLET: Yeah. Mom was a bride's maid or somethin' when he was married to his wife, and she's dead now.

ANDREW: Myrtle Horn she was. I used to kinder buzz around Myrt a little myself.

HAMLET: Mr. Davenport ain't been back here since they were married. Him and mom was a talkin' it all over.

ANDREW: Your ma and Myrt used to be powerful close friends.

HAMLET: They was cousins.

ANDREW: When I used to go courtin' the gals, you never seen one er them without lookin' fer t'other. . . . Myrt's been dead quite a spell now.

HAMLET: But Mr. Davenport didn't never marry again. He said it was just like she'd went yesterday.
ANDREW: There's them as is one woman men, and others—well, as ain't so perticular. Personally, I always 'lowed I'd be a marryin' man.
HAMLET: I heard Newt Light say that Mr. Davenport owns four thousand acres of the best apple country in Oregon, and that he has at least fifty thousand dollars coolin' in the bank.
ANDREW: All that money and ain't no tellin' what's to become of it. It's a pity Myrt didn't have no children. . . . It's a dog-goned mixed up world, anyhow. Here I am—eleven children and no money.
HAMLET: Reckon what he'll do with his money?
ANDREW: Dunno. Wish he'd give me $39.15 I bin owin' on groceries at Kimbrough's store fer six months. A side er bacon at my house don't last no longer than a loaf er bread. . . . It do look like I have got the out-eatin'-est family in three counties.
HAMLET [*fanning a bee away from his sugar*]: Shoo. It's a bee.
ANDREW [*fighting at the bee which flies over to his sugar*]: Git away. Git away, durn you. [*Aggrieved.*] Sence Scena Mulberry tuk to keepin' bees, it's got so you can't have a comfortable game of bumblepuppy in ten miles, 'thout bein' pestered to death. Shoo, . . . Say, young feller, if you're a playin' bumblepuppy with me, you lie back in that hammock where you belong and stop inchin' up. How'm I gonner git that four bits out er your pocket and you a crowdin' your sugar like a settin' hen?
HAMLET [*lying back in the hammock*]: All right.

[*He looks towards the house a little doubtfully.*]

ANDREW: I don't suppose you want ter quit and go up to the house along of the company.

HAMLET [*hesitating*]: I reckon they ain't studyin' me.

ANDREW: Yep. We ought to finish this game. It would be a pity to stop without somebody winnin'—after we've worked this hard.

HAMLET [*almost wistfully and a bit confessionally*]: You know, Mr. Bugg, sometimes I think I'd like to go off to some fer place like—like Oregon—like Mr. Davenport done when he was young. Don't nothin' ever seem to happen around here.

ANDREW: Well, the bollweevil gits worse.

HAMLET: To us, I mean. It would be a heap er fun to go off and do somethin' like Mr. Davenport. Looks like the folks that goes away from here has it all over us that stays.

ANDREW: Oh, I don't know. There was Bazzie Grimes. He went all the way to St. Louis and caught the pneumonia and died. He might have done as well if he'd stayed home.

HAMLET [*almost dreamily*]: I'd like to see Oregon. . . . Mr. Davenport says he's got an apple orchard more'n a mile square. . . . That must be a pretty sight—all in bloom.

ANDREW: It must be a heap er work to pick all them apples.

HAMLET [*continuing dreamily*]: He says in Oregon—

ANDREW [*interrupting*]: You know, Ham, Gentry Davenport was lucky. His pa died and left him

with a mortgaged farm that couldn't nobody make a living on nohow.

HAMLET: You call that luck.

ANDREW: Yep. It was plain luck I tell you. 'Twarn't nothin' fer Gentry ter do after the bank sold off the farm to pay the mortgage, but to light out all together. Now, if his pa had left him an everyday onery farm—the kind my Cousin Plutarch Pittard's been a starvin' on fer thirty years, he'd be adown here settin' on it to-day, wonderin' where he was goin' ter find enough money to put a new roof on the spring house. . . . Bein' tied to a little pore land have caused a heap er folks a lot er trouble.

HAMLET: Mr. Bugg, with your way of figurin' out things you'd orter be a rich man.

ANDREW [*holding out his hand in protest*]: Naw, sir. I figured it warn't worth while. Now, my chillun is goin' to have a chance equal to anybody. They ain't goin' to have nothin' to hold 'em down.

[ANDREW *abruptly gets up, and dropping his fan apparently tries to kill a fly between the palms of his hands. After one or two passes, he finally crushes it.*]

HAMLET: Hey, what you a doin'? How are we ever goin' to finish this game and you a killin' off all the ammunition?

ANDREW [*seriously, holding out his hand, to which the body of the fly has clung, for* HAMLET *to see*]: 'Twarn't nothin' but one er them yaller tassel flies, Ham. [*He flecks the fly away with his forefinger.*] I know some folks counts 'em. [*Contemptuously.*] But I never could take no comfort in a game er bumblepuppy with tassel flies. A tassel fly ain't got

near as much sense as one er these here little black cur flies. Look how much easier they is to kill. I always says, if you're a playin' tassel flies, count me out. [*Encouragingly, as he picks up his fan and settles back into his chair again.*] I seen a black fly a scoutin' around up there just now. He's already done gone up to your house to tell some er his friends.

HAMLET [*resentfully*]: I'll bet they're all off somewhere havin' a nap.

ANDREW: Well, there's one thing to be said fer this climate, Ham. Those on us that gits to Hell is more'n likely to feel at home.

HAMLET: Mr. Davenport say it don't never get hot in Oregon.

ANDREW: Yep, but I reckon the winters is powerful cold. I'd ruther sweat a little than be froze to death. . . . [ANDREW *and* HAMLET *begin to be slightly more active with their fans in guarding their sugar, as though the flies had begun to gather around it.*] You know, I used to go to school with Gentry Davenport. He was a little spindle-legged feller —always had his big toe tied up in a rag. He was everlastingly stubbin' his toe. His voice had a way er slippin' up where it didn't belong, and he always seemed to be tryin' to hide behind somethin'. God-amighty, how he's changed. I was at the station the other mornin' waitin' fer the mail when he come in on Number Four. He walks over to the porch er Kimbrough's store a steppin' like a race horse and all curried up in a blue suit and a collar and tie like a prize mule at a fair—"Hello, Andrew," he says right away, a holdin' out his hand to me. I thought

he was one er them St. Louis drummers a tryin' to be democratic fer business reasons.

HAMLET: Show nuff?

[*He fans away a persistent fly.*]

ANDREW: Didn't none of us know him, he was that pepped up.

HAMLET: He do have a mighty active air about him.

ANDREW: What you might call too active, if you ask me—without meanin' no disrespect to Gentry, it always makes me kinder nervous to see a man bustin' with too much energy.

HAMLET [*sympathetically*]: It ain't comfortable.

ANDREW: It's a sign his nerves is inflamed. It's unhealthy.

HAMLET: I always had a feelin' it must be somethin' like that.

ANDREW [*philosophically*]: I reckon Gentry can't help it. . . . There warn't nobody to meet him at the station the day he come in—that there telegraph office in town had forgot to telephone out to Maria Abernathy and tell her he was a comin'. I carried him down to her house as I come on with the mail.

HAMLET [*fanning*]: Shoo.

ANDREW: Course he wanted to hear about everything. [*Speaking as though it were a surprising fact.*] You know, when you come to figure it up, there's been a heap er changes in this county in the last twenty years. . . . He didn't know about the lumber mill Tracy Minor and Abe Pittard had built back er Pigeon Roost, and he hadn't heard nothin' at all about the big fire when Uncle Charlie Taylor's store and the gin burned down. [*Looking*

doubtfully at HAMLET.] . . . *I guess you was too* young to remember that.

HAMLET: I kinder recollect.

ANDREW: Gentry was mighty interested in hearing about you. He said when Myrt got a letter from your ma tellin' that you was comin' into this world, she was that excited, it might have been a baby of her own. He wanted to know what kind of a feller you was. I told him that personally you seemed a pretty good sort, but it was the gals around here that was show-nuff enthusiastic about you.

HAMLET: Aw, come on, Mr. Bugg. . . . Quit yer hurrahin' me.

[*Both men become interested in defending their sugar from the flies.*

From the right enters GENTRY DAVENPORT, *neatly dressed in a dark blue suit and panama. When he takes off his hat, which he does as soon as he gets into the shade of the trees, one sees that he is grizzle haired, with the healthy, ruddy tan complexion of a man who has long been active out of doors. His movements are quick, and suggest vitality and impulsiveness. His collar is a bit too high and worries him a little now and then, so that while his appearance is decent enough, one feels he is very probably wearing his Sunday clothes and is slightly conscious of them.*]

GENTRY: Hello, Andrew—afternoon, Hamlet.

ANDREW AND HAMLET [*at once*]: Howdy, Mr. Davenport.

Evenin', Gen.

HAMLET: We wus just talkin' about you.

[ANDREW *and* HAMLET *wield their fans against the flies.*]

ANDREW: We seen you drive up with Maria.

GENTRY [*breaking out*]: Why, what's this—gosh ding it, if it ain't bumblepuppy! [*Amused.*] Haven't thought of bumblepuppy in twenty years. You still play that around here, do you?

ANDREW [*dryly*]: Some on us do. . . . Shoo.

GENTRY: You still wet the lump and wait for the flies, eh?

[*He laughs heartily.*]

HAMLET [*pointing to the chair back of the table*]: Take a chair, Mr. Davenport.

GENTRY [*sitting down and fanning himself with his hat*]: Well, that'll be something to tell 'em about when I get back to Oregon—Bumblepuppy.

[*He laughs.*]

ANDREW: You want ter get in the game?

GENTRY [*protesting good-naturedly*]: No, I guess I haven't got time. What's the stakes?

ANDREW: Four bits.

GENTRY: Well, you are getting reckless around here. Used to be a quarter in my day.

ANDREW: Waal, everything costs more these days. You used to could get a shave fer ten cents.

GENTRY [*slyly*]: Did you ever play golf, Andrew?

ANDREW [*turning his head slowly and regarding* GENTRY]: Golf? Naw, what's that?

HAMLET: Cow pasture pool. You've heerd of cow pasture pool, ain't you?

ANDREW: One er them new fangled games, I reckon. But I 'low it ain't no better than the rest. I've

played 'em all in my time—parchesi, flinch, ping-pong, horseshoes, checkers, croquet—. My gals is just mailed off a coupon fer one er them Chinese games—Ma's wrong er somethin'. But I tell 'em 'tain't no sense in sendin' off. There ain't no game that suits this climate like bumblepuppy.

HAMLET: Mr. Buggs is kinder partial.

ANDREW: Naw, sir. Sugar ain't hard to get and I ain't never seen flies no rarity. [*Fanning.*] Shoo. A man can't afford to wear hisself out in this climate. He'll get all pulled down by the hot weather if he do.

GENTRY [*turning to Hamlet with an air of becoming serious*]: I suppose you are going to be a farmer like your daddy, Hamlet?

HAMLET [*sitting up in the hammock. He speaks with a slightly embarrassed little laugh*]: 'Essir, I reckon so.

[*Despite a slightly pompous verbiage, there is a kindly, simple sincerity about* GENTRY *which makes him sympathetic.*]

GENTRY: Well, I've always been partial to the land myself. A man can do well on a farm if he works hard and keeps his fence corners clean. I've done pretty well. I had to work hard, too—but I'm not sorry. A farm ain't any place for a boy that don't want to work. He might just as well go to the city and have done with it.

HAMLET [*with the little nervous laugh*]: 'Essir.

GENTRY: We've got some mighty bright boys out our way. Hard workers, too. Some of 'em are going to be rich men. [ANDREW *yawns and makes a "ho-hum" sound.* GENTRY *turns to him.*] What?

ANDREW [*quickly, with a guilty innocence*]: I didn't say nothin'.

GENTRY [*turning to* HAMLET]: But you know, Hamlet, I don't think those Oregon boys are any better than our boys here. I've been gone a long time, but I never have forgot that I grew up a boy in these hills round Pigeon Roost. I've always loved these old, rocky, red hills, poor as some of 'em are for making a living—And I don't believe there's a finer set of folks anywhere on God's Green Footstool . . . Now, the folks out in Oregon. . . .

[ANDREW *begins to fan vigorously.* HAMLET'S *attention is also distracted by the flies and he busies himself defending his sugar.*]

ANDREW [*to* HAMLET, *as they fan vigorously*]: Lay back—None er your inchin' on me.

[HAMLET *lies back in the hammock and for the next few moments they engage busily in the game.*

GENTRY *is obviously annoyed with the interruption of his fine sentiments, but the players are too occupied to notice him. He looks from one to the other, purses his lips and apparently swallows down an irritation. Then, with an assumed patience, he waits for them to pay attention to him again. Eventually, the flies give the combatants a respite and* HAMLET *turns to* GENTRY.]

HAMLET: You was sayin' something, Mr. Davenport.

GENTRY [*still slightly ruffled*]: Well, I—

ANDREW: Keep right on talkin'. It don't bother us and the flies don't mind.

HAMLET: About Oregon?

GENTRY [*with dignity, after a slight hesitation*]: Well, I was about to say—[ANDREW *fans again.*] There's a great future for a young man in Oregon. Plenty of room and plenty of room to grow. [ANDREW *fans again.*. GENTRY *is annoyed, but continues, speaking meaningly, with a glance at* ANDREW.] There's a different spirit, too. If I was a young man to-day, I'd go to Oregon. But, of course, every feller can't just pick up and leave. . . . [*Forgetting his irritation in his interest in what he has to say.*] For a long time, Hamlet, I've been thinking. A farmer can do a lot of thinking, if he's a mind to—

ANDREW [*interrupting*]: I does a heap er studyin' about things, myself. I reckon that's why I never did move into town. . . . I'm kinder philosophical. I come near movin' into Addle Junction, though, once. . . . Sorter wish I had.

GENTRY [*to* HAMLET]: Before Myrtle went, I used to dream we might have a son. But that wasn't to be, and I've always had a feeling it was sinful for a man to let his thoughts go flying in the face of Providence.

ANDREW: Thoughts is pretty skittish things. Tryin' to drive 'em down this road and that is worse than herdin' a lot er young colts.

GENTRY [*not unkindly, but pointedly*]: Those that do all they're put into this world to do, don't have time to let their thoughts go wandering off like a lot of young colts.

ANDREW [*fanning*]: Shoo.

GENTRY: When I get thoughts that aren't practical,

I try to find something in them for deeds that are. I began doing that a long time ago, Hamlet, and I found it paid. . . . Our young men have got to dream dreams and see visions, but dreaming and seeing aren't enough.

HAMLET [*with a laugh*]: No, sir.

GENTRY: There's doing.

HAMLET [*with a laugh*]: 'Essir.

GENTRY: Providence put a lot of young folks in this world. If they aren't my sons, they are other people's, and I know what a helping hand means from the lack of one. I began to wonder—well, I'll explain a little more, first. I've been thinking a lot about Pigeon Roost lately—

HAMLET [*fanning*]: Shoo.

GENTRY: Somewhere in those hills, I says to myself, there's a young feller that might—

[*The two players begin to fan vigorously and grow excited in the game.*]

ANDREW: Hep.

HAMLET [*countering him*]: Oh, no, you don't.

[*They forget all about* GENTRY, *who rises angrily and paces the ground indignantly, glaring at the game.*]

ANDREW [*as the fanning slows down*]: Waal, that was a real pert roun'. Flies round here just as lively as they ever was, Gentry. You know, folks devils a lot about flies and they is a nuisance, but summertime without flies would seem mighty queer. . . . You was a-sayin' something', Gentry?

GENTRY [*shaking off his irritation and trying to take a tolerant view of things*]: Oh, well, I guess I'm the

one that's changed. . . . Trying to find things like you remembered 'em over twenty years—A man's got to be practical—I might as well try and see things—

[HAMLET *and* ANDREW, *who have been listening to* GENTRY *with one eye on their sugar, have started fanning again and once more forget* GENTRY. *This is too much for him and he loses all control.*]

GENTRY [*bursting out*]: Oh, Hell.

ANDREW [*not understanding, and turning slowly*]: What'd you say?

[*Having exploded, after a moment's hesitation,* GENTRY *seems to change his whole intention. He loses all his resentment and answers amiably.*]

GENTRY: It's a hot day, ain't it? [*He mops his brow with his handkerchief.*] . . . Well, I reckon I better be getting back up to the house. Maria will be waiting for me. I just came down here to tell you folks good-by. I'm going back to Oregon to-morrow.

[HAMLET *and* ANDREW *both stop the game in surprise.*]

HAMLET: To-morrow.

ANDREW: Why, you ain't stayin' long to have come so fer.

GENTRY [*amiably*]: That's home out there now, you know. Just wanted to look over the old stamping ground once more. [*He starts over to shake hands with* HAMLET, *who begins to struggle out of the hammock.*] No, don't get up. I'd hate to dis-

turb your bumblepuppy. [*Shaking his hand.*] Good-by, Hamlet, my boy. Come out to Oregon and see me some time. Bring your wife, it'll make a fine wedding trip. [*He turns to* ANDREW *and goes over to him, shaking hands.*] So long, Andrew. Take good care of yourself. I'm going to tell them out in Oregon what a bumblepuppy champion you are. [*Suddenly.*] Look out—there's a fly lighting on your sugar now.

[ANDREW, *startled, turns back to defend his sugar, and* GENTRY *makes a quick exit, calling "Good-by." The bumblepuppy play becomes lively.*]

HAMLET: Whoa. Keep down in your chair there. Hold steady. . . . It's too late. Hey! Hey, stop. He's already on it.

ANDREW [*jumping up and slinging his fan down, as an irate golf player*]: Oh, mad-dog backward.

HAMLET [*getting out of the hammock*]: I won fair. Where's your money?

[*He holds out his hand.* ANDREW *hesitates a moment, looks uncertain, then reluctantly puts his hand into his pocket, carefully drawing out some change, which he examines, looking down sideways.*]

ANDREW [*speaking at last, with resignation*]: Well, Ham, here's fifteen cents. [*Speaking positively.*] I had four nickels. There must be a hole in this pocket. [*He turns the pocket inside out and examines it, then offers the fifteen cents to* HAMLET.] Here. [*More cheerfully.*] I'll just owe you thirty-five.

HAMLET [*good-naturedly*]: Any time, Mr. Bugg.

ANDREW [*picking up his hat and mail sack*]: I reckon I better be movin' on. I ain't gettin' no younger standin' here. [*Hospitably.*] Come go home with me.

HAMLET [*equally hospitable*]: I can't. You come go home with me.

ANDREW: Much obleeged. [*He starts to go, when he looks off stage and stops a moment.*] Yonder goes Maria and Gentry. [*Rather suddenly.*] Did it strike you Gentry wanted to say something while he wus down here that he didn't never git out? . . . 'Peared to me he talked kinder jumpy-like— You know, I thought— [*Shaking his head meditatively.*] No, I reckon I'm wrong. I guess that's just a way folks has er talkin' out in Oregon.

HAMLET [*who has also turned to watch the departing visitors, speaking wistfully*]: Gee, I wish I was going out to Oregon. [*The two stand looking after* GENTRY, *making a picture for a moment; then* HAMLET *breaks the spell.*] Oh, shucks.

[*He turns back from looking off.*]

ANDREW [*consulting a large Ingersoll watch on a leather thong*]: Quarter to five.

HAMLET: Is that all? [*Yawning.*] I got time for a good sleep afore supper.

ANDREW [*going out*]: So long.

HAMLET: So long. [*Calling after him.*] Play you another game of bumblepuppy some day.

[*He stretches himself and makes sleepy noises in a kind of yawn, then gets into the hammock and composes himself for a nap. Above, in the foliage, the locust takes up his song more droningly than ever—zuree—*

zureeeee-zureee-zzz-z. The hot afternoon sun has turned to ruddy gold. The curtains come together slowly, just as a faint, reassuring, peaceful snore is heard from HAMLET.]

CURTAIN

BLOCKADE

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BLOCKADE

by

Olivia Howard Dunbar

CHARACTERS

Lura Jerrod
Rose Barstow
Jennie Barstow
Miles Barstow
Herbert Appleby
Gideon Barstow

Time: *Half-past nine on Sunday morning in mid-June.*

Place: *The rear of* Miles Barstow's *simple frame house in a thrifty New Hampshire village.*

Scene: *The outer wall of the house forms also the rear wall of the stage. Attached to the house, and occupying the rear half of the stage, is a porch, roofed but without walls, furnished with table, chairs, Gloucester hammock, and so on, as though habitually used as an out-door sitting-room. One gets the impression of neatness and moderate comfort. The porch is reached by steps from the surrounding yard and garden, which occupy the front half of the stage. A*

path at the side leads to the invisible front approach to the house.

LURA JERROD *enters by the side path, looks about, mounts the porch steps, knocks. She is a fair-haired woman in the early thirties, quick and supple and with much of the air of girlhood. She is simply dressed, wears no hat, an unselfconscious type.*

ROSE BARSTOW'S *childish voice comes from within the house*: Mother! Mo-ther! Somebody's at the do-or! . . . Mo-ther! *A pause. Then a child of about nine, in stiff white dress with colored ribbons, opens the door.* Oh!—it's Mrs. Jerrod! Won't you come in?

LURA: I'll stay out here, thank you, Rose. I want to see your mother, if she's at home.

ROSE [*removing a Sunday newspaper from a rocking chair*]: Why, I *think* she's at home. Here's a seat for you. I don't see where she can be. [*Opens door and calls again.*] Mo-ther!

LURA: You're prompter than most little girls in getting ready for church.

ROSE: Oh, I go to Sunday-school. That begins at ten, you know. I'm afraid I'm a little late; so—if you don't mind waiting— Mother's sure to be here soon.

LURA [*who has not seated herself*]: Just a minute, Rose. [*Lowers her voice.*] Won't you tell me how Uncle Gideon is before you go?

ROSE [*stops short, evidently disturbed*]: Why, he's —why, he's—

[*She stands on the edge of the porch and looks away from the house, beyond the garden, left. Her voice breaks.*]

LURA: Never mind, Rose dear. I know what a comfort you are to him. [*Puts her hand on the child's shoulder and regulates her voice, obviously so as not to be overheard, yet cautiously, so that this may not seem too marked to the child herself.*] Have you seen him this morning?

ROSE [*in a sobbing whisper*]: They won't let me go out there.

LURA [*maintaining her cautious tone*]: They won't let you go? . . . When did you see him last?

ROSE: A week ago. . . . Oh, I can *see* him almost any time, of course.

LURA: What do you mean?

ROSE [*looking steadily off-stage*]: Why, you know where he lives, don't you? See that little shack between the apple-trees? Look hard and you can see him, too. Through the window. Well, anyway, you can see the chair he always sits in. And the back of his head.

LURA [*follows the direction of the child's eyes and they stand together looking, both eagerly interested*]: Yes. I see.

ROSE [*in a sudden shrill whisper*]: Look! That's where she's been! Mother, I mean. Out with Uncle Gideon. Now she's turning to come back. Do you see?

LURA: She has to go out to see that he's comfortable, I suppose.

ROSE [*shrugs her shoulders in imitation of an adult mannerism*]: I don't know why she goes. She won't

let me go, and she won't tell me why. But she goes herself. She keeps going and *going.*

[*They check this conversation as* JENNIE *approaches and begin to move about on the porch, a little unnaturally.*]

LURA: How well your mother's garden is doing.

[JENNIE BARSTOW *enters through the lilac bushes, left, front. A handsome, black-haired, complacent young woman of thirty. She pauses an instant, as though thoroughly seizing the meaning of the two others' embarrassed attitudes, then moves quickly up the steps.*]

JENNIE [*in a level voice without emphasis*]: Good-morning, Lura. I was wondering whose voice I heard. You're quite a stranger. Be seated, won't you? Rose, you'll be late for Sunday-school. [ROSE *goes inside.* LURA *sits down but is unsmiling and has no reply for the glib formalities of her hostess.*] Perhaps you'd rather come inside, Lura. But it seemed to me rather close in the house this morning.

LURA [*hastily*]: Oh, no, it's better here.

[ROSE *comes out quickly, with her hat on and an oblong something in her hand.*]

ROSE: Good-by, mother. Good-by, Mrs. Jerrod.

JENNIE: Rose, have you packed your bag?

ROSE [*evasively, in a low voice*]: I don't want any bag.

JENNIE: Of course you do. Aunt Caroline expects you to be all ready to go with her the minute church is over.

ROSE [*faintly*]: But I'm coming home to-morrow.

JENNIE: Oh, no, you're not. You'll need enough clean dresses to last you some time. But run along. I'll bring the bag when I come.

ROSE [*much embarrassed*]: I haven't—said—good-by—to anybody.

JENNIE [*firmly*]: I don't want you to delay a minute longer, Rose. What have you in your hand?

ROSE [*almost in tears*]: My picture—to leave with Uncle Gideon.

LURA [*to* ROSE, *who is standing very near her*]: May I see it, dear? . . . Why, what a startling picture! That is—I didn't realize you are so like your mother!

ROSE: That's what Uncle Gideon says! He remembers—

JENNIE [*rising, hastily straightening the child's hat and getting her down the porch steps*]: That's enough, Rose. Leave the picture here. And hurry up. [*Reseating herself and laughing faintly, with a desperate effort to conceal her annoyance*]: Have you ever seen anything like the way children dawdle?

[*There is an awkward pause.*]

LURA [*abruptly*]: Jennie . . . I came to ask you . . . we hear strange things, or Sam does, down at the post-office. Being postmaster, he'd have to be stone deaf not to sense *some* of the things that people talk about.

JENNIE [*indifferently*]: I imagine so. Regular news factory, people say it is down there.

LURA: They've been saying things lately about Gideon. Perhaps you know what I mean. It's upset Sam a good deal to hear them. And it's upset *me.* That's why I've come here.

JENNIE: It's queer that those people that hang around the post-office and gossip don't seem to realize that Gideon has his own folks to look after him. I don't know who's got a right to be more interested in Gid Barstow than his own brother. Miles and I have looked after Gid,—all he'd let us, anyway,—for ten years. And I expect we always shall.

LURA: Well, I don't know that Sam could be any *more* interested in Gideon if he *was* related to him. And I'm sure that I—

JENNIE: Oh, yes, of course it isn't a new thing, *your* being interested in Gideon.

LURA: That's true enough. I've believed in Gideon all my life. I still believe in him. Gid isn't like the rest of us, Jennie. He could have been a big man if he'd had the chance. Gid could do anything!

JENNIE: Well, Lura, I ought to know Gid pretty near as well as you. After all, you weren't ever engaged to him.

LURA [*slowly, with a straight look*]: No, I was never engaged to him. And I never threw him over.

JENNIE [*is silent for a moment with surprise, shock, anger*]: I must say nobody ever took the liberty of saying a thing like that to me before. What if we *were* engaged? Could a man sick in bed with an injured back, *marry?* What could Gideon do but release me? And if you mean that I—well, you know very well that not a soul has ever criticized either of us.

LURA [*gently*]: I know, Jennie, I know. Things have been easy for you, always. And I'm sure I don't want to make them any harder. It's only that

a person who knew Gideon when he was strong and gay and sort of wonderful can't help feeling pretty bad about him now. What if he does use strong language sometimes?

JENNIE: You might not talk in that easy-going way, if you really knew the things he says.

LURA: Who wouldn't curse, I'd like to know, in Gideon's place? And when it comes to a stranger's actually starting in to persecute Gid, and to boast about it, as they say the new minister's doing. . . . But perhaps that isn't so. . . . It's what I came to ask you.

JENNIE [*with hostility*]: Ask *me?*

LURA: Well, it seemed that the one right human being for me to come to about this was you, Jennie Sprague,—you that Gideon thought the world of. Thinks the world of, still.

JENNIE: Lura, you talk like an old maid. I don't know who'd think you'd been married most a dozen years. I suppose Sam Jerrod knows the way you go on about Gideon.

LURA: Don't get the idea Sam and I don't understand each other. Or that Sam isn't the best husband in Mullen's Bridge. But Gideon. . . . Why, you know yourself the sort that Gideon is, Jennie. That different sort that—takes your breath away. . . .

JENNIE [*coldly*]: Gideon's rather weak, *I* always thought.

LURA: *Weak? Gideon?* . . . Then why aren't you helping to protect him? Against this meddling minister, for one thing, against Appleby.

JENNIE: You don't go to church much, do you? I shouldn't be surprised if the people that do go

knew more about Mr. Appleby than those that just hang around the post-office.

LURA: You mean he *isn't* meddling?

JENNIE: Meddling! What's a minister for? Isn't he supposed to help the sick and the . . . sinful?

LURA: Gid Barstow sinful!

JENNIE: I can't explain it to you. The minister could. But [*hesitates*] that accident of Gideon's was an act o' God. From the minute that happened to him he wasn't *meant* to have the same kind of life as the rest of us. But the trouble with him is he won't see that. He's defiant, Gideon is, he's blasphemous. You see, you don't really know anything about it, Lura. [*Impressively confidential.*] It isn't ordinary swearing, this talk of his. *He curses God!* He says things most people would be afraid to *think*. He'll say them before a roomful. He doesn't care who hears him. Mr. Appleby says the young men of this town have simply got to be protected.

LURA [*agitated*]: Then I suppose it's true,—what they say about the minister's plan—

JENNIE [*with cold impatience*]: Well, really, Lura, *we* think Mr. Appleby has been quite forbearing. You see, it isn't only that Gid curses God. He curses Mr. Appleby. And all the poor man wants is Gideon's own good. Gid's part of his job here, he says. He's *got* to make him see things differently.

LURA: By making him suffer.

JENNIE: Oh, well, Gideon's intelligent enough. And if he sees that public sentiment's against this blasphemy of his—

LURA: Public sentiment! A scare cooked up by Appleby!

JENNIE: And that his own folks are right, after all—

LURA: What can he think of his own folks when they treat him as they do? Keeping that child of yours away from him just because he's fond of her! And when nobody knows as well as you do why he cares for her the way he does! She's you all over again, Jennie.

JENNIE [*shakes her head*]: You don't know Gideon —now.

LURA: Well,—that's true, I suppose. I've seen so little of him in all these years that I can still think of him as he used to be. That's the way I always do think of him,—the way he looked that day of the accident—

JENNIE [*bored*]: That's harking back pretty far, Lura.

LURA: But you know you can't forget it any more than I can, that you and I were the very last ones to see him,—standing there on the scaffolding outside the church window and waving at you in that gay laughing way of his. . . . And you . . . [*with sudden passion*] oh, it was just like you, Jennie Sprague, to pay no attention to Gideon because he *was* looking at you and to call out to Miles because Miles *wasn't* . . . all on account of your being so pretty you felt that every man had to see you. . . . Would Miles ever have fallen if he hadn't turned to look at you? Would Gideon ever have fallen if he hadn't tried to save his brother?

JENNIE [*sharply*]: Lura! What in the world ails you, to be trying to bring back feelings that are so

long over with? When that thing happened, it was the same for me as if Gideon died. It had to be.

LURA [*with a short laugh*]: An easy way out. And still, even *you* couldn't make it quite the same, could you, Jennie? If Gideon had really died, wouldn't you have waited a little longer than you did before you married Miles?

[JENNIE *shows that* LURA *has gone too far in saying this. But before she can speak a man's figure appears on the path leading from the front of the house. This is* HERBERT APPLEBY, *the minister, a tall young man of about thirty-five with very light-colored, icily-brilliant eyes. There is an exchange of greetings.*]

APPLEBY: Oh, Mrs. Barstow,—I stopped in to see your husband on my way to the morning service. Is he at home?

JENNIE [*very gracious, her manner showing all the traditional deference to the cloth*]: Yes, indeed, I'll call him. He's been getting ready, upstairs. [*Goes inside the door where she can be heard calling.*] Miles! Can you come down? Mr. Appleby is here to see you. [*A slight pause. Then, in a whisper that she tries not to have overheard.*] The *minister's* here, I say. [*Meanwhile* LURA *and* APPLEBY *glance coldly at each other and say nothing.* JENNIE *returns and addresses* APPLEBY.] Miles will be down in just a moment. And I know you'll both excuse me because I have to dress for church. [*Looks pointedly at* LURA, *who makes no move to go.*] Lura, perhaps you'd like to step around to the south porch and see my peonies.

LURA: I'm going now, Jennie. But— [*She seems to be obeying a sudden impulse.*] Yes, I should like to take a look at your garden first. I do love a moss rose bush, and I see you have one. [JENNIE *nods a cool farewell and goes inside.* LURA *pauses on the porch steps and looks back at the minister.*] Mr. Appleby, Gideon Barstow still has friends to defend him. Don't—don't go too far.

[*Without giving him a chance to reply, she goes quickly down the steps and into the side garden, out of view of the audience.* APPLEBY *opens the limp black volume with gilt edges that he has in his hand, and starts to read in it. After a little,* MILES BARSTOW *comes slowly out of the house.* MILES *is spare, rough-edged, reddish-haired. His unsmiling manner suggests embarrassment, resentment, provincial rigidity.*]

APPLEBY: Beautiful morning, Mr. Barstow. [*They shake hands.*] I dropped in for just a moment's talk— How is your brother this morning?

MILES: Why, I haven't seen him. But Gid doesn't change much, I guess.

APPLEBY: I'm going out for a word with him, presently.

MILES [*embarrassed*]: Well, my notion is, Mr. Appleby, that we've just got to let Gid alone, more or less, if you don't mind my saying so. He doesn't seem to care about too much advice. I often don't see Gid, myself, for a week at a time.

APPLEBY [*seems not to listen to* MILES. *Springs up, looks at his watch and begins pacing the porch as he talks*]: I must be careful not to be late for

service. . . . But before I take this final step it's important that I have accurately in mind all the points that you and your wife have spoken of. . . . Let me see.—Your brother formerly lived here in the house with you, I think you said:

MILES [*somewhat more animated*]: Why, yes, we did our best to keep him here with us. Jennie was only too glad to look after him. She even urged our having him, in the first place.

APPLEBY: I understand.

MILES: But he had his own way about it. Out he went. Moved out there into the old woodshed before little Rose was a year old.

APPLEBY: No violent quarrel, that is, just—

MILES: Why, we didn't quarrel, Mr. Appleby. I don't understand Gid always, nor he me, I suppose, —but, Lord, no *words* between us!

APPLEBY: And your wife is a friendly woman.

MILES [*recollecting*]: Well, it may have been a little different where Jennie was concerned. Jennie herself, she's as even-tempered as the day is long, but Gid used to flare out at her in a queer way now and then. Fond of her too, he always was. But I guess a sick chap's nerves—

APPLEBY [*consulting his notebook*]: She still looks after him, I suppose.

MILES: No. He won't let her. Cooks, cleans, everything,—crippled as he is. And supports himself, too. That's what cuts me, Mr. Appleby,—to see my brother cobbling shoes.

APPLEBY: But that's a part of his defiance? He has no need to practice such a trade?

MILES: Lord, no! I guess you'd better understand

all that, Mr. Appleby. I don't want to be misjudged . . . [*Hesitates, shows that he doesn't easily express himself.*] I don't mind admitting Gideon was a better man than I. My father would have left him the carpenter business. But when he saw Gid in bed with a broken back, father thought he had to leave it to me instead. Of course he kind of left Gid in trust to me, too. Knew I'd always look after him. Took it for granted Gid would live along with his own folks, that is, with Jennie and me . . .

APPLEBY: You were already married then?

MILES: Well, you see, things happened pretty swiftly. Perhaps you didn't know that for a while, Jennie,—Jennie Sprague she was then,—was engaged to my brother. But of course when he was so badly injured—

APPLEBY: Weren't you both injured?

MILES: We both fell from the scaffolding outside the church. We were helping father build it—that very church you preach in. Gid tried to save me. But I was only bruised, after all, and he,—well, you know about that. But he was the best man, Mr. Appleby.

APPLEBY: It's a hard thing for a strong young man to be stricken down. . . . But I hardly need to remind you, Mr. Barstow, that physical well-being is a secondary thing. The supreme things are within your brother's reach as much as ever.

MILES [*is silent for a moment, evidently too much moved to be able to control his voice. Then speaks rather brokenly*]: He hasn't had a chance, Gid

hasn't, tied to a chair like that. It's—been—too—hard.

APPLEBY [*briskly moving on to his purpose*]: But we shall help him. [*Seizing the gilt-edged volume.*] Mr. Barstow, I'm going out to your brother now. I shall pray for him.

[*He starts to go.* MILES *rises and obstructs his path.*]

MILES: Don't try that, Mr. Appleby, it's no use. Gid would never pray with you if you stayed out there a week. He'd curse all the harder. And anyway, I guess we'll have to be sort of lenient to Gid, whatever he does. Or says. After all, churches have a good deal to say about—well, about forgiveness, haven't they?

APPLEBY: Mr. Barstow, I hope I can always forgive my own enemy. But God's enemy I must smite. Your brother is God's enemy.

MILES [*startled*]: God's enemy!

APPLEBY: And that is why I expect to take this matter in hand, publicly, this morning. You oppose my speaking to your brother first. Very well. You remember I have already warned him. When we are all assembled at divine service [*as he says this,* JENNIE *enters, dressed for church*] I shall pray for him. And I shall warn those who incline to support him in his impious life.

MILES [*agonized*]: Good God, don't do that!

JENNIE [*in the firm voice of one accustomed to control*]: Miles, Mr. Appleby knows. We'll leave it all to him.

MILES [*looking away from the others, staring miserably at the wall*]: But I'm thinking of my father

and mother . . . and the publicity and the disgrace. . . . And I'm thinking of what poor Gid has already suffered . . .

APPLEBY: He will suffer less when he ceases to defy God. That's the peace I want to secure for him.

JENNIE: You see, Miles.

APPLEBY [*his voice rising*]: But whether he suffers or not, I've got to go where my vision leads, I've got to strike for God with the sword that God himself has buckled on.

MILES [*making a forlorn appeal even while he weakly defers to the others' assumption of power*]: But you can have all this out with Gideon,—alone. You can't mean that you're going to speak his name —up there—in the pulpit—? [APPLEBY *nods affirmation. His implacability stiffens as the helpless* MILES *implores him.*] We've had sinners in Mullen's Bridge before this, Mr. Appleby. Mean, low sinners. But not one of the rest of us ever felt good enough to throw a stone as sharp as this. . . . Oh, God, there in the church that father built . . . a stranger standing up to say hard things about my father's son . . . about a man that's suffered so . . .

APPLEBY: When war is declared against God, those who are not for him are against him. I shall not tell these young men whom your brother's blasphemy has corrupted to retaliate by any injury. Not that. But they must make it clear to him by a sort of . . . blockade. . . . Blockade, that's the word—

JENNIE: So that when he has no more shoes to mend

—isn't that what you mean?—and perhaps even finds it hard to buy things—he'll—

APPLEBY: He'll surrender. Precisely. We've learned something of technique from the Great War. You see, this is God's territory, this little town. Minister and laymen alike, we're all God's warriors. I think it won't be feasible for an enemy to hold out against us long. I know you understand, Mrs. Barstow. [JENNIE *nods respectfully, while* MILES *sits apart, his head in his hands.*] And if your husband doesn't understand, he must none the less force himself to submit. It is the church's authority that speaks. . . . Come, it is late, shall we go?

JENNIE [*in the artificial tone of firm sweetness often used with children*]: Come, Miles. [MILES *shakes his head.* APPLEBY *grasps* JENNIE'S *hand, hurries down the porch steps and out of the yard.*] Miles, we have three minutes. Here's your hat. [*She briskly locks the door of the house; and then places the key behind the window-blind. Then takes him by the arm, with policeman-like brusqueness.*] It's your *duty*, Miles. It isn't a question of how much you like it.

[*He rises slowly, exhibiting a distorted face; and follows her down the steps.*]

MILES [*in an unnatural voice*]: This is a bad business, Jennie. I tell you you're all wrong. . . . All wrong. . . .

[*Exeunt both.*]

[*A short silence follows. Then a sharp whistle is heard, left. After a moment, this*

is repeated. Shortly GIDEON BARSTOW, *in his wheeled chair, enters from the left.*]

GIDEON [*in a low, eager voice*]: Rosy! Rosy!

[LURA *comes on stage from an entrance nearer the back, unnoticed by* GIDEON. *Before he sees her, she speaks,—softly.*]

LURA: Rosy isn't here, Gideon. Nobody's here.

[*There is a pause. She stands still, looking at him, trying not to betray her sense of shock at the change that illness and years have made in him. Until he smiles, he looks much older than he is. He suggests a not unfamiliar New England type,—lean, thin-faced, with piercing eyes,—but his face shows a more than typical intelligence and sensitiveness. He makes no movement of surprise, but approaches* LURA *a little more closely.*]

GIDEON [*quite naturally*]: It's you, isn't it, Lura?

LURA [*hesitates, and stammers*]: I—I've grown old, Gideon.

GIDEON: Old? [*He seems to reflect, as he continues to look at her.*] Well, we're all old. Or feel like it. But you—why, I believe you seem like the time when we were young, Lura. [*Short pause.*] It's a long time since you've been to see me. . . . [*With sudden suspicion.*] I suppose you didn't come to see me now.

LURA: Yes, I did, Gideon. [*She speaks quickly.*] But I wanted to wait till the others were gone. Seems kind of sneaky.

GIDEON: The coast is clear now, isn't it? I've been trying to get a glimpse of little Rosy. Have you

seen her? They've frightened her,—or—God knows what. [*He sees pain and sympathy on her face.*] Don't mind, Lura. You see, you're not used to me.

LURA: They've sent Rosy on a visit.

GIDEON: On a visit,—well.

[*He laughs, shortly.*]

LURA: There's something here she wanted to give you before she went. She did her best to. [*Goes up on the porch, takes* ROSE'S *photograph from the table and brings it down to* GIDEON.] I had a moment's talk with her. About you, it was. Poor little thing. It's hard for her, too, Gideon.

GIDEON [*studying the photograph with amused tenderness*]: An overlooked snap-shot. Seems to be the one time that she managed to run into the field of somebody's camera before her mother had a chance to curl her hair or tie ribbons on her. It's like her, too, isn't it? Good little girl!

LURA: Yes, it's like her. And like Jennie.

GIDEON [*rather heavily, without looking up*]: Jennie. Yes. You see it, do you?

LURA [*looks intently at* GIDEON *for a moment. Then, nervously, hastily, as if unable to endure contemplating him and all that his talk and appearance suggest*]: Gideon, do you mind my saying it?—this is no place for you.

GIDEON [*half to himself, in a voice without expression*]: No. It's no place for me.

LURA [*very earnestly*]: Don't you see that what you ought to do is get away from it all?—without any fuss,—quietly?

GIDEON [*looks up at her in surprise. Then answers*

simply]: Yes, of course. Without any fuss,—quietly.

LURA: Well then. This is just what I had to say to you. Let us help you get away from it,—Sam and I. We can arrange it all. You go out at the back gate any night,—to-night, if you like. Sam will take the Ford and pick you up on the lower road. I'll drive you both over to Stony Hill and you can catch the night train. In a few hours you'll be in Boston. Sam will take you to his cousin's in the South End. She's just the woman for you to live with. And we'll do all the explaining that's necessary after you're gone.

GIDEON: Well. And then . . .

LURA: These busybodies would have to interest themselves in something else.

GIDEON [*bitterly*]: I might sit on Boston Common and hold out a tin cup. Or I might ask Miles for money and have Jennie withhold it. Or I might even take help from you and Sam—

LURA: But *Gideon!*

GIDEON: Oh, well, Lura, I would take help from you and Sam if I needed it. But can't you see how it is? The truth is that there's nothing that anybody's money could buy for me. Nothing . . . that is . . . now—

LURA: It's a wholesome thing to cast off habits Gideon.

GIDEON: Yes. But it's more than habit that's made me—cling here.

LURA: Life in a city would be a complete escape from everything that torments you. And the magic of it!—I'd go myself to-morrow if I could.

GIDEON [*shaking his head*]: There's no escape for me in cities. At least I know better than to suppose I could find peace away from this place I was born in. Do you mean to say that you could do without it, Lura? I mean . . . the sound of water, always, and the sight of orchards . . . and the little brown roads creeping around the edges of the hills. . . .

LURA: If you could have lived on in your old place—

GIDEON: But they didn't know—at least, I suppose they didn't, what that place meant to me. Something possessed Jennie to get Miles to sell it. . . . And they brought me here. . . . Inside that little house with them. . . . [*He stares toward the windows.*] . . . Three of us. . . . We were so close, so infernally close. . . . And Jennie always there. It was—it was Hell, Lura.

LURA: I know, Gideon.

GIDEON: So I moved out to the woodshed and took up cobbling. [*More lightly.*] You'd be surprised to see what a good job I make of it, Lura. No complaints from anybody.

LURA: I know how fond the boys are of you. Sam tells me.

GIDEON: I free my mind to them a good deal. Sometimes about mending leather. Sometimes about life. That's what started this new preacher to stir up such a row. He doesn't like my language.

LURA: Your life's all wrong, Gideon.

GIDEON: Good God, it isn't life at all. It's down-and-outness.

LURA: I don't know why we shouldn't talk plainly. You're not wasting your life because you hurt your back once. You're wasting it because you didn't marry Jennie Sprague.

GIDEON [*coolly*]: Is that what people say?

LURA: People? No, people don't say it. I say it. And I think it's time you knew that even if you had married Jennie, you couldn't have been happy. That's true, Gideon, believe me. Jennie isn't—what you think she is.

GIDEON [*laughs*]: How do you know what I think she is?

LURA [*somewhat confused*]: Well, I know of course you've always been romantic about Jennie.

GIDEON: It's a good many years since I've been romantic about Jennie! [*Pauses, meditatively.*] But she's not what you think she is, either, Lura.

LURA: Oh, I imagine I understand Jennie well enough.

GIDEON: Why, you've no more idea of the instincts that dominate Jennie Sprague than—Miles has. A woman like Jennie can torture a man for years—within her husband's very sight—and nobody be the wiser. You think you understand her? No woman could understand her. It's men she feeds on . . . it's men that suffer for that damned power she has. . . . You see, she won't let you forget her, . . . or get away from her . . . or come to terms with her. . . . And she's so damned respectable all the time, such a pattern to women!

LURA [*eagerly, passionately*]: I *must* help you out of this, Gideon. Think, tell me what I can do for you.

GIDEON: Well, there's one thing you can do for me, if you don't mind. Before Jennie comes back. Did they lock the door?

LURA: Yes, but I'll get in if you want me to. Where do they put the key, under the mat or inside the blind?

GIDEON: Inside the blind,—see? You'll have to go upstairs. In their room.

LURA [*securing the key*]: But I— [*Hesitates.*]

GIDEON [*easily, firmly*]: Just up at the top of the stairs. And in the top drawer of the tall chest. They've mentioned where it is a hundred times.

LURA: What is it you are sending me for?

GIDEON: A black leather case. It's in with Miles' collars.

LURA [*stands still and looks at him soberly*]: I can't get you any—black leather case, Gideon.

[*There is a pause. Neither moves.*]

GIDEON [*with a sudden nervous movement*]: You're afraid I might have an accident. Is that it? . . . Still, you know you offered.

LURA: Not that, Gideon.

GIDEON: If I were likely to have any accident,—do you suppose you could prevent me? You know you couldn't. There are a dozen easy ways that—accidents could happen. And I guess there isn't one I haven't thought of. So you see—it's nothing so important I'm asking of you. [LURA *stands looking away from him, fingering the key to the house.*] Why, you aren't nervous about a little piece of technical housebreaking, are you?

LURA: I can't do it, Gideon.

GIDEON: I'll swear to you I'm not planning any-

thing,—I may never open the case, even. [*She shakes her head.*] You're going to stand in line with all the rest, then? Denying, balking me. . . . Women change, don't they? I have a notion you'd have done it for me once, Lura.

LURA: Oh, Gideon, I—

GIDEON: We were great friends once, weren't we? [*Slowly, meditatively.*] Do you remember, I wonder, Lura,—oh, I suppose you've forgotten it all, though, years ago—that spring before—before Jennie and I began going together?

LURA: Gideon, I shouldn't wonder if you were speaking of the kind of thing people don't forget,—ever.

GIDEON [*after they have looked at each other steadily for a moment, both minds evidently full of recollection*]: Lura!—You were the dearest little thing!

LURA [*leans and quickly, lightly, puts her arms about* GIDEON, *then moves away from him*]: It was a long time ago, wasn't it? But I guess we'd always sort of understand each other, you and I.

GIDEON [*follows her with his eyes*]: You think so? You think you can understand the inside of the kind of chap I've come to be? Look at me! Miles deep in a mess I can't pull out of.

LURA: Only because you don't want to, hard enough.

GIDEON: I don't want to, at all.

LURA: Somehow I just can't bear it, Gideon, to hear you say that. Do you mean you're going to let Jennie destroy you, after all?

GIDEON: Damn Jennie!

LURA: Exactly. Start fresh then. You're still young. There isn't a man in Mullen's Bridge that's

a match for you. For God's sake, Gideon, look beyond this little personal ant-hill. I believe in you so!

GIDEON: Why, Lura!

LURA: I do. I always have. And deep inside, you must still believe in yourself. You do, don't you?

GIDEON: Go on, Lura. Wake me up if you can. But remember that that part of me has been a long time asleep.

LURA [*coming close to him*]: That's nonsense! I believe I'm glad, after all, you're not going to Boston. Stay here and show them who Gid Barstow is!

GIDEON [*half convinced*]: You think I've been childish. I dare say I—

LURA: No, no! And I won't treat you like a child! A while ago you asked me to do something for you. I couldn't do it, then. But I've changed my mind—

GIDEON [*half indifferently*]: You mean you'll go upstairs and get my case for me?

LURA: Yes, I will. And then you'll know how much I believe in you. If you were weak-minded, or sick-minded, it might be right for me to shield you. But I guess Gid Barstow's strong enough to make his own decisions.

[GIDEON *nods gravely.* LURA *turns and mounts the steps, quickly unlocks the door and goes inside.* GIDEON *exhibits a good deal of nervousness as he waits alone. The silence is suddenly broken by the sound of men's voices, at the front gate.* MILES BARSTOW *is talking, in subdued tones, with some acquaintances. Their words cannot be distinguished.* GIDEON, *realizing that* MILES

may appear at any moment, whistles softly in the hope that LURA *will hear him.*]

GIDEON [*in a hoarse whisper*]: Lura! Lura! For God's sake, hurry!

[LURA, *with extreme rapidity, so that she almost seems to be flying, comes out of the house; locks the door, replaces the key, each action accomplished by one well-directed movement, comes down the steps, places a black case in* GIDEON'S *lap.*]

LURA: It's all right, dear, they won't know. And remember, Gideon, remember why I've done this. I'm running out by the back gate.

[*She vanishes.*]

[GIDEON *remains motionless for an instant, looking after* LURA *and obviously thinking of her. Then he recalls the likelihood of an encounter and quickly wheels himself to the front left corner of the stage, behind bushes, in such a position that he can see any one approaching by the side path yet himself cannot easily be seen. He has evidently stationed himself to watch. After a moment more, the sound of voices at the front gate ceases, and* MILES BARSTOW *enters, slowly, by the side path. He is absorbed, stricken. He does not see* GIDEON, *but mechanically enters the house, closing the door behind him. Another short wait. Then voices, this time women's voices, in a different and shriller key, are heard off stage.* JENNIE *is parting with a group of women who have come home with her.*]

JENNIE [*off stage*]: No, thank you, there's nothing you can do. My husband *is* a good deal shaken. It's a hard thing to have your own folks go wrong. . . . Why, thank you. . . . No, we haven't any feeling against Mr. Appleby at all. He did the right thing as he saw it. You could see that in every word he spoke. . . . Yes, I do certainly feel it will be best for Gideon in the end. It takes discipline to make us realize, sometimes. . . . [*Her voice altering.*] No, Sarah, I hadn't forgotten about the church supper Thursday night. I'll bring the scalloped oysters.

[JENNIE *comes briskly on stage and is about to step up on the porch.*]

GIDEON [*sharply*]: Jennie. Wait. Come here.

JENNIE: You *here*, Gideon?

GIDEON: Your friend Appleby carried out his threat this morning?

JENNIE [*surprised, embarrassed*]: How did you know?

GIDEON: I heard you talking outside. . . . [*Lightly, contemptuously.*] Well, what did he do? Church full, I suppose?

JENNIE: Yes, the church was full. He prayed for you,—a long time.

GIDEON: And Rosy heard?

JENNIE: Yes.

GIDEON: And you and Miles, you prayed for me, too. [*Laughs.*] But Appleby didn't stop with praying, did he? He talked some, besides?

JENNIE [*explodes in resentment of* GIDEON'S *tone and attitude*]: Well, yes, he did. He explained how

dangerous you have come to be. . . . He calls you . . . God's enemy.

GIDEON: And Rosy there! . . . Well, what next? I'm a leper, am I? Ostracized and all that?

JENNIE: Well, I suppose you might as well know it, Gideon. He says the church people mustn't encourage you any more. That is, they mustn't come to see you. Or have any business dealings. . . .

GIDEON: What's that? They won't sell me a loaf of bread, even?

JENNIE: Well, no, I suppose not. But Mr. Appleby warned you, Gideon. You knew what you were bringing on yourself.

GIDEON: He tried to scare me. But it's happened, has it? And in that church. Doesn't it amuse you, Jennie, that it should happen in the church I built? I wonder if Appleby knows. If he did, perhaps he'd have tried to pull it down. Smashed it while he was smashing me. . . . "God's enemy!" The pious fool! . . . . So they'll all turn against me, now, will they? Starve me out. . . . The chaps I've grown up with. . . . Appleby's sheep. . . .

JENNIE [*speaks more softly, comes nearer* GIDEON, *picks a thread from his sleeve, attempts to straighten his tie*]: Gid Barstow, you know well enough the whole thing rests with you. All you've got to do is . . . [*she pauses, evidently searching for a churchly phrase*] make your peace with God.

GIDEON: Well, that doesn't seem to be in my line. . . . Though if you hadn't told me so often that it was God who tumbled me off that scaffolding, I don't know that I should find God so . . . irritating.

JENNIE [*still softly, not scoldingly*]: You've gone

about as far as you could, haven't you, Gid? Scandalized the community and defied the minister and made Miles and me just about sick with worrying over you. Well, all you have to do is show some respect for religion and decency and things will be all right again.

GIDEON: Suppose I decide to stick it out in my own way, Jennie? Where are you going to stand? Along with religion and decency?

JENNIE: Why, Gid, what could you expect of us?—with Miles a deacon in the church.

GIDEON: Never mind Miles. What would *you* do? Send Rosy out to see me with some of your good mince pies? Or would you help them boycott me?

JENNIE [*pats his shoulder, smilingly*]: You know very well I had to promise Mr. Appleby. But it needn't ever come to that. Just say now that you'll give in, Gid. Let me telephone the minister.

GIDEON [*looking at her searchingly*]: You know I could have amounted to something, even as a cripple, if only it hadn't been for you, Jennie. You, with your devilish nearness, always . . . [*she moves quickly away from him*] . . . and your devilish distance . . . I wonder if anybody ever hated a woman as sincerely as I hate you.

JENNIE: I won't listen to your blasphemy!

GIDEON [*laughs*]: Are you so respectable that it's blasphemy to hate you?

JENNIE: You didn't mean that, Gideon. We're own folks, remember. We're brother and sister.

GIDEON: Own folks? Why, so we are. [*He reaches out and seizes her dress, changing his tone to one half mocking, half impetuous.*] Then kiss

me, Jennie. You never have, you know, all this time, and we've been brother and sister, as you call it, for ten years now.

JENNIE [*freeing herself with vigor*]: Kiss you? Not in a *hundred* years! I'm a good woman, Gideon Barstow. You can't tempt *me!*

[*She leaves him without looking back. As she goes up the steps of the porch, she meets* MILES *coming out.* GIDEON *wheels himself off stage very slowly, inch by inch, so as to suggest to the audience that he will remain within sight and hearing of the action on the stage.*]

MILES: Where have you been, Jennie? I saw you come in the gate ten minutes ago.

JENNIE: Why I—I was talking with Gideon a minute.

MILES [*in a helpless, smitten manner*]: You didn't —tell him, did you, Jennie? Poor old boy.

JENNIE: Nothing that he didn't know already. [*Then, thoroughly aware that* GIDEON *is a spectator of what follows.*] Come, Miles, sit in the hammock and read your morning paper. You haven't looked at it. I'll bring dinner outside and we'll have it here, to-day. There's a surprise for you in the ice-box.

MILES [*vaguely*]: Why, I—

JENNIE: We miss Rosy. But it's nice to be alone sometimes, isn't it? [*She puts her arms about his neck and kisses him.*] Isn't it, dear?

MILES [*pleased, excited, looking into her face*]: Why, Jennie, you don't often—kiss me again, Jennie. *Kiss me!*

[*She complies and he embraces her eagerly, hungrily. They are standing thus, close together, silent, when a shot sounds from the lower garden where* GIDEON'S *chair stands. Then another. They separate in slow, stunned fashion, looking with horror in each other's eyes.*]

CURTAIN

THE END OF THE TRAIL

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THE END OF THE TRAIL

by

ERNEST HOWARD CULBERTSON

CHARACTERS

BILL WATSON
MARTHA HINLEY
JOHN HINLEY

TIME: *Dusk.*

PLACE: *The cramped living room of a trackwalker's shack in the Cascade Mountains, Oregon.*

SCENE: *When the door at the back is open one gets a view of beetling pine-studded mountains, and through the small four-square paned window on the left a glimpse of the narrow, hemmed-in valley. Far, far down the valley, just visible in the gathering dusk, one can see the flickering eerie lights on the switches at O'Fallon's siding, beyond the gray, ominous walls of the canyon. On the opposite side of the room a door leads into the only other room of the house. Beyond it, toward the back, is a shelf with old pasteboard boxes, half a dozen partially filled medicine bottles, almanacs with the backs*

off, and an oil lamp. Immediately underneath, on nails and hooks, hang a variegated assortment of old coats, jumpers, overalls, hats and aprons. A dingy yellow "slicker" is carelessly thrown over the back of a chair. In the corner stand several pairs of old boots and shoes, soles and uppers still thick with the encrustations of red and yellow mountain clay and dirt.

Against the left wall, near the front, stands a dilapidated wooden bed. The humble folk who sleep upon it each night do not even boast the luxury of a spread. Two heavy blankets serve as covers and two pillows, encased in soiled and mussy pillow slips, rest at the head.

In the center of the room is a rough-hewn table covered with a red and white checked cloth. On it lie a number of newspapers, several dog-eared books and a dish or two. On a tall, slender packing box at the back of the room near the door is an unlit red lantern. Distributed about the room are rough kitchen chairs.

Attached to the wall beyond the back window is an antiquated telephone of the style in use in the middle and late 'nineties. Near the door leading into the other room hangs the crayon portrait, in a smudged gilt frame, of an eight-year-old boy, and on the wall at the back, the portrait of a girl about eighteen. Over the door on the right hangs

an old shotgun and several mounted cow horns.

MARTHA HINLEY *is discovered seated near the table patching an old pair of trousers. She is a woman of about fifty-two. The events of a hard, bitter life have taken their toll and she looks old and broken—much older than she really is. Her hair is gray and thin and drawn back tightly from a wrinkled forehead. Her cheeks are shrunken and drawn. The expression in her eyes alternates between brooding, tragic despair and angry, bitter protest. She works, now with the listlessness of one for whom the burdens of life have come to weigh too heavily, now with feverish, impetuous vigor, as though to drive out the thoughts which crowd into her mind. Once she drops her work with a little cry of anguish, jumps up and goes to the window, where she stands with clenched hands, staring fiercely out, and breathing convulsively. She turns away with a sigh of resignation at length, returns slowly to the chair and takes up her work again.*

Presently, as though from some distance down the mountainside, comes a far-away "Hello!" MARTHA *rises and hurries to the door at the back. She opens it and steps out. She peers intently down the trail and after a brief interval spies some one, and waves her hand.*

MARTHA: Hello thar!

BILL [*his voice faint and echoing*]: Hello! Hello, Marthy!

MARTHA: Hello, Bill!

[*Pause. She stands watching him intently.*]

BILL [*a bit more distinctly*]: This trail gits steeper every time I travel it.

MARTHA: Takes all the steam a body's got.

BILL [*his tones quite clear now*]: An' when yuh're old an' ain't got no steam—

MARTHA: Yuh're steppin' like a two-year-old!

BILL [*with a laugh. He is quite near*]: Don't give me no belly-wash like that—w'en yuh kin hear my j'ints creak from har to Chilton. [*Pause. Then he speaks as though only a few steps away.*] Whewee! The more yuh ile 'em the wuss they git!

MARTHA: Spokane "red-eye" ain't the right kind-a ile.

BILL: Not even Injun "red-eye" 'ud make 'em swing easy. [*Appears at the door.*] Been nigh onto three weeks since I was up har. Thought I'd drap over and see how John was treatin' yuh—an' what yuh're ideas is on politics an' religion—and the natur' o' things in giniral.

MARTHA: Him an' me was jist talkin' 'bout yuh last night.

[MARTHA *enters, followed by* BILL.]

BILL: Now I know why my ears was itchin' like blue hell. [MARTHA *smiles—faintly.* BILL WATSON *is a big, gruff miner. His hair is dark and straggly, and the lower part of his face is covered with a stubble beard. He wears overalls, a leather coat and boots and carries an old battered felt hat*

in his hand. He closes the door after him.] Whar's John?

MARTHA [*with somber preoccupation*]: Out on the tracks. He—he's down toward O'Fallon's sidin'. [*Steps to the window, and stares out apprehensively.*] Couple of slides down that-a way last week. He don't hardly sleep nights from worryin' for fear thar'll be more.

BILL: When a lot-a loose dirt an' rocks gits restless an' hit the trail down'ards all hell an' a year of lyin' awake nights ain't goin' to stop 'em.

MARTHA [*turns away from the window*]: That's what I keep tellin' him. But it don't make no difference what yuh say to him.

BILL: No, I s'pose not.

MARTHA [*points to chair which stands to the left of the table*]: Sit down!

BILL: Er—don't mind if I do. [*Hesitates a moment, spies a chair toward the back and with a shy school-boyish manner, grabs it and sets it to right of table.*] Thar, Marthy.

[MARTHA *drops down in the chair,* BILL *sits at left of table, pulls out a short clay pipe and proceeds painstakingly to fill it.*]

MARTHA [*dismally*]: Slides—slides! If it ain't them—it's somethin' else.

BILL: This is the time of year fer 'em. Gotta take things as they come, Marthy, in this hard world.

MARTHA: Easy enough ter say that.

BILL [*studies her intently*]: Yuh take life too serious.

MARTHA [*bitterly*]: Most anybody would—who'd been through what me an' John has.

BILL: Life ain't no easy, greased-slide fer nobody.
MARTHA: It's give us nothin' but kicks an' slams.
BILL: Yuh stick too close to home, Marthy—if yuh don't mind me tellin' yuh.
MARTHA: Somehow I don't take ter none of the people out this har way.
BILL: John could easy git yuh transportation back to St. Paul—whenever yuh want it.
MARTHA [*with a little shudder*]: Don't never want to see St. Paul agin. The—the only time in my life when I been a little bit happy was back thar. It—it's whar I first knowed John—me an' him was married thar—an' my first baby was born in a little house down on Lisner St.—an'—an'—well—yuh jist see—
BILL [*nods and blows a mouthful of smoke at the ceiling*]: I understand, Marthy.
MARTHA: Never seen nobody so conscientious as John.
BILL: Allus on the job, ain't he?
MARTHA: As long as he kin crawl he'll be out thar doin' his part.
BILL: I knowed he was a hustler the first day I sot eyes on him.
MARTHA: The limited's due in half an hour—an' yuh couldn't drag him off them tracks till it gits through.
BILL [*smiles*]: Kind-a stuck on that ole rattler, ain't he?
MARTHA [*nods*]: Like as if it was a pet or some teeny child. He's half sick from worryin' whenever it gits held up—just a little bit. As if he could stop a washout or a slide or keep it from snowin'!

BILL [*with a contemplative, understanding smile*]: He's jist built that way—that's all.

MARTHA: If he'd only let up—just a little. He's gittin' old an' he ain't strong. The company don't half 'preciate him. Never did an' never will!

BILL: Men like John don't git their due in this world. The best they kin hope for is to store up glory for "kingdom come."

MARTHA [*shakes her head*]: He ain't got no right to be out thar now. He—he was walkin' them tracks till half-past twelve last night—till after Number Two went through. Then up again at five—an' out most-a the day.

BILL: Don't want ter take no chances. Couldn't if he wanted ter.

MARTHA [*rises and lights the red lantern*]: Liable ter rush in har any minute fer this. May as well git it ready for him. [*Returns slowly to her chair and sits.*] What credit does he git fer takin' his job serious? Fer not sleepin' nights—fer bein' out in all kinds of weather—gittin' his feet an' hands near froze off—fer killin' himself by inches? Let a little wreck happen along somewheres—an' they make him out responsible—an' all them thirty years' work for the road ain't goin' to count fer nothin'.

BILL: I wouldn't swim no rivers till I come to 'em, Marthy.

MARTHA: Allus—ever since he started out workin' fer it—it's been the road. The road! He's so sweet an' gentle-like—an' tries to reason it all out. Now an' then he gits took down with a spell of sciatica an' he lies thar on the bed an' talks to me by the hour 'bout it. Keeps goin' on 'bout this har

road—an' the others—bein' to the country what a vein or artery is to your body—an' that we are doin' somethin' patriotic an' noble by helpin' keep 'em in shape. He calls our road "a gateway to the Orient." Says somebody's got to do the work to keep it in order an' clare an' it might as well be us.

BILL [*blows a mouthful of smoke at the ceiling*]: That's one way-a lookin' at it!

MARTHA [*in harsh, rasping tones*]: I don't see it that-a way—an' never will! I don't see nothin' noble in slavin' an' slavin'—year in an' year out—an' most-a the time so onhappy an' half-sick yuh wish yuh was dead! Thar ain't nothin' in it!

BILL: Yuh an' him have had it hard.

MARTHA: An' it keeps gittin' harder—the older we git—

BILL: Yuh an' John been pretty close-mouthed. Yuh ain't never tol' me how yuh happened to come up this har way.

MARTHA [*frowns, compresses her lips, then proceeds*]: He—he started out as a wiper on the engines in the round-house in St. Paul. It was his first job—Joe Ferriss give it to him—an' I met him 'bout a year or two after. It wasn't long 'fore they made him a hostler, an' then him an' me got married. After he'd been thar 'bout ten years they made him a foreman. He hadn't had this job no more 'an a year or two 'fore his health got so bad he couldn't hardly drag one foot after 'nother. The smoke an' grease an' dirt was too much fer him. [*She taps her chest.* BILL *nods.*] The company give him a job as assistant section boss out at Minot. He done so well that the boss got scar't he was goin'

to git his job, an' made complaints to the superintendent. After that they made him engineer at a water tank out in the Badlands. Not a tree, or a house, or a fence within ten mile of it. Most God-forsaken place yuh was ever in. [*She hesitates a moment and gives a dry racking sob.*] The climate thar didn't agree with our daughter Minnie an'—an' she died. An' no more had she been dead an' John hurt his hand—an' he was laid up ever so long. It crippled him fer life. Ever since he ain't been able to do no liftin' or handlin'.

BILL: I notice he allus favors his left hand.

MARTHA [*nods*]: Then Sam Bartlett—he was assistant to the Master Mechanic—got him a job as agent at a little station called Ulm on the Butte branch. [*Glances up at the picture on the wall.*] It was while we was thar that little Harry died. The—the water done it—we allus thought. We couldn't stand stayin' thar after that. Then they give John this track walkin' job. [*She jumps up and strides to and fro with clenched hands and a wild, malevolent glitter in her eyes.* BILL *smokes in contemplative silence. The wind rises to a mournful howl. With a shudder.*] Listen to that wind! Listen! A storm's comin'—!

BILL: We may git a little snow.

MARTHA: Blizzard more likely.

BILL: Oh, I dunno. They tell me the Chinook's goin'-a blow steady this winter.

MARTHA [*with a sneer*]: What does anybody know how the Chinook is goin'-a blow? [*Raising her voice to a plaintive, raucous wail.*] Oh, fate has been agin us—beatin' us down, grindin' us in the

dirt, pushin' us under! When I look at these har mountains—so high an' turrible—they seem to be mockin' us! Mockin' us, I say!

BILL: I git to feelin' that way sometimes myself, Marthy. But it don't do no good. It's usually when I ain't had my sleep an' this har cantankerous liver-a mine is cuttin' up didoes.

MARTHA [*goes to the window and stares out, then turns away with a shudder*]: Back in the shops in St. Paul—in the winter—when they're gittin' the sleepers ready fer the run to the coast, the men keep sayin' to each other, "Well, I hope she gits through the Cascades." An' they keep askin' each other an' the crews that come through from Seattle an' Portland, "How are the Cascades? Did yuh make the Cascades all right?" At Minot when Number One westbound passes Number Two eastbound yuh can't hear nothin' but the nigger porters on Number One shoutin' at them on Number Two, "How are the Cascades? Are they chock full of snow? Are we goin' to git caught?" Or in summer, "How are the Cascades? Any fires? Are the Cascades clare?" At St. Paul, Minot, Havre, Kalispell or Seattle—'tis allus, "How are the Cascades?" The whole road stands in fear of 'em—like some great divil that kin cast a spell. An' when the snow begins to fly yuh kin feel the fear settlin' down on everybody—like a pall—east an' west.

BILL [*nods*]: I know, I know. They allus been hell in winter.

MARTHA: An', now, har we are—right up in 'em—agin 'em—facin' another turrible winter! I git

chucked right up agin' the very things I hated an' feared. [*Breaks off and stares fiercely into space.*] If—if it wasn't fer John—Gawd bless him—I don't know what I'd do. He's all I got now! [*Savagely.*] Why should we be doin' this so rich people from back east kin ride through in fine upholstered coaches—sleepin' safe— [*Wildly.*] Oh, I hate 'em—I hate 'em—an' these har turrible mountains! [*Suddenly the door bursts open and* JOHN HINLEY *staggers in, deathly pale; blood streams from a deep gash on his forehead. He is middle-aged, with weather-beaten face, mild blue eyes, and thin gray hair. His shoulders are stooped. His manner is kindly, philosophic, mild. He wears a pair of worn and patched overalls, a jumper, and over this a short leather jacket. In one hand he carries an old cloth cap, with ear flaps turned down.* MARTHA *leaps to his side with an agonized cry.* BILL *rises and hurries to him.*

MARTHA [*grabs his arm*]:

John! John, honey! What's the matter?

BILL [*supporting him on the opposite side*]: What hit yuh, ole man?

JOHN [*feebly*]: A slide! It got me!

MARTHA: Oh, my Gawd!

BILL: Whar did it git yuh?

JOHN: Mostly on—on the side—seems like—I dunno—a rock hit me on the head. Knocked me out—fer a few minutes.

MARTHA: I knowed somethin' like this was goin' to happen! I knowed it!

JOHN: It—it's a good thing I was out—an' seen

it—right thar—two hundred feet west-a the tool house—

[*Points off.*]

MARTHA: Yo're pale—an' yuh ain't breathin' right—my pore honey! Whar—whar does it hurt yuh? Tell Marthy!

JOHN [*weakly, as he makes a pathetic attempt to smile*]: I—I ain't bad off. Don't take on. All I got was a bad bumpin'. To—to please yuh we'll have the company doctor come out on Number Four in the mornin'—an'—

[*His knees suddenly give way and he starts to sink to the floor. They exert their full strength and manage to keep him on his feet.*]

MARTHA: John—honey! [*Searches his face with an anguished gaze.*] Yuh're weak as a rag—! Whar does it hurt? [*In an hysterical undertone to* BILL.] He ain't goin' to—?

BILL [*shakes his head violently and replies in peremptory tones*]: No, no! Git him over on the bed.

JOHN: I'm—I'm goin' to—to be all right. Just a bad bumpin', that's all.

[*They half carry him to the bed and lay him on it.*]

MARTHA [*with* BILL'S *help, slowly takes off his leather coat*]: No, no—don't try to set up—! That—that—! We'll git it off. Be careful. Oh! [*They contrive to get one sleeve off without much difficulty. He winces and groans as they turn him gently over on his side to get off the other one.*] Does it hurt yuh thar?

BILL: His shoulder, I reckon. Easy, ole boy!

JOHN [*with a little gasp and feebly*]: My—my side —jist a little—

MARTHA [*while* BILL *holds him she pulls off the other sleeve with the greatest care*]: Thar—! Thar—! Up easy-like—jist a little. That's it! Now—now— [*She tosses the coat on a chair, then with* BILL's *assistance places him gently back in position.*] Git me a pan-a water an' a rag, Bill—quick—!

BILL: Yes, ma'am.

[*Hurries into the adjoining room. She takes a small roll of bandages and a towel from the table drawer, then returns to the bed.*]

MARTHA [*bends over and gazes beseechingly into his eyes*]: Honey, are yuh hurt bad—d'yuh think? Tell me! 'Tain't goin' ter do no good if yuh make out yuh ain't—if yuh are. It's only goin' ter make things worse.

JOHN [*with a pathetic little laugh*]: Just side-swiped me—that's all. Set me down kind-a hard. Now, don't yuh worry, Marthy. I'll be up an' around an' spry an' chipper as ever—in a day or two—

[*His face contorts and he breaks off as though suffering.* BILL *reënters, carrying a small tin pan of water and a ragged wash cloth. He pulls up a chair to the side of the bed near* MARTHA, *sets the pan on it and hands the cloth to her.*]

MARTHA: I'll git that blood an' dirt off yuh're face.

JOHN [*to* BILL]: Looks as though—I got handed —a kind—a rotten deal.

BILL. [*shakes his head*]: One-a them things yuh can't figur', ole boy.

[MARTHA *washes* JOHN'S *face.*]

MARTHA [*examines the cut*]: That's—that's a bad 'un, honey.

JOHN [*with a feeble laugh*]: Did git me kind-a square.

MARTHA [*with a shudder*]: Might-a been one-a them big 'uns that 'ud mashed the life clean out-a yuh.

JOHN: But it wasn't, Marthy—an' a miss is good as a mile. [*She wipes his face, and carefully adjusts the bandage. All at once a wild look comes into his eyes and he raises himself on one arm with a tremendous effort. With a cry of fear and anguish.*] Marthy.

MARTHA: What is it?

JOHN: The limited!

MARTHA [*glances at the clock*]: 'Tain't due in Chilton yet. We got plenty of time. An' it may be late.

JOHN: The slide—it took down the lines—! See if yuh kin git Chilton—!

[*The woman rises quickly, goes to the phone on the wall, turns the crank rapidly several times, then puts the receiver to her ear.*]

MARTHA: Hello, hello! Hello, hello! [*She presses down the receiver bar and gives the crank several rapid turns.*] Hello, hello!

JOHN [*in a hoarse whisper*]: See—! I told yuh—! They're down—!

[MARTHA *hangs up the receiver, and comes back to the bed*]

BILL [*in a low voice*]: Couldn't git 'em?
MARTHA: No.
JOHN [*excitedly*]: Somebody'll have ter flag her now! Somebody'll have ter git out thar with the lantern—!
BILL: I'll hike down ter O'Fallon's an' swing it thar at the head of the Canyon.
JOHN: Yeah, yeah, Bill—that's what yuh do—! Give 'em the "high ball" thar—! Marthy, d'yuh hear—?
MARTHA: Don't yuh worry, honey! We'll take keer of that all right. 'Tain't the first time it's happened this way. Thar, thar, now! Yuh remember— [JOHN's *face suddenly contorts in pain, and he gasps and sinks back on the bed. She leans over him in anguished solicitude.*] What is it? What is it? Tell me, honey! Does it hurt yuh so bad?
JOHN [*puts a hand to his side*]: It's gittin' me—right thar—
MARTHA: Yes, yes. Let Marthy rub it fer yuh.
[*She starts to open his shirt. He groans.*]
JOHN: Some—somethin' hot, Marthy—reckon it'll do more good 'an rubbin'.
MARTHA [*jumps to her feet*]: The bag-a hops! [JOHN *smiles faintly and nods.* BILL *starts toward back, as though to get the lantern. With a convulsive sob as she hurries to his side and lays a restraining hand on his arm.*] Bill—!
BILL: Yeah—?
MARTHA: Stay har with him till I git the hops het up. Only take me a minute or so. Then yuh kin go.

BILL: Sure, Marthy—jist as yuh say—

[*Inclines his head toward right.*]

MARTHA: Thar's plenty-a time—

[*She moves quickly toward the door leading into the next room, pauses to glance at* JOHN, *sobs, then exits.* BILL *returns slowly to the side of the bed.* JOHN *gives another little gasp, rolls his eyes for a moment or two, then groans softly.*]

BILL: Givin' yuh hell, eh? [JOHN *nods.*] Yuh will step in front of the side of a mountain jist to save the company a little time an' money. [*Laughs.*] I'm kind-a hefty meself—but I never figured I could buck a ton-a flyin' dirt an' rocks an' git away with a whole hide.

JOHN [*smiles*]: Didn't git no chance ter look her over.

BILL [*shakes his head playfully*]: Wouldn't put it past yuh—even if yuh had. No, siree!

JOHN [*with another effort raises himself on one elbow*]: Listen—! [*Glances apprehensively toward door, reaches over and grips* BILL's *hand tightly.*] I'm pretty bad off. It—it was a big 'un an'—an' it caught me square. I—I heard her comin' but I warn't spry enough. She caught me an' carried me down thirty feet this side of the track. Right out har—three hundred foot from the house. Knocked me plumb out. When I come to, they warn't nothin' but my head stickin' out. Mouth was full of dirt—an' my eyes, too—so I could hardly see. I—I had to dig an' claw my way out. Didn't have no strength—an' I don't know how long it took me ter git out. Seemed like hours.

[*He pauses, breathing with difficulty.* MARTHA *can be heard sobbing hysterically in the adjoining room.*]

MARTHA: Oh, Gawd! Oh, Gawd! Why d'yuh bring things like this on us! Why d'yuh? [*With a wail.*] I knowed something like this was goin' to happen! I knowed it!

JOHN [*with an expression, half of heartfelt sympathy and half of despair*]: Listen to her! Jist listen!

BILL: Takes it hard, don't she?

[*Her lamentations stop momentarily.*]

JOHN [*speaks with greater effort now*]: I had-a crawl on my hands an' knees—most all the way har.

BILL [*bends over and peers into his face*]: Yuh don't look none too good!

JOHN: Somethin's busted inside.

BILL: Yuh think so?

JOHN: It feels that way. An' I seem ter be gettin' weaker.

BILL: We oughter git a doctor har quick.

JOHN: I dunno—I might be able ter hold out—until mornin'—

BILL: But McCafferty won't send no "doc" out on Number Four—'cause thar ain't no way of lettin' him know what fix yuh're in.

JOHN [*resignedly*]: Then—then thar ain't nuthin' ter do—but sit tight.

BILL [*with an idea*]: I could hitch up them broncs-a mine an' git over to Hooper Springs in a couple of hours. If ole Doc Fletcher ain't out somewhars I kin pick him up an' maybe with luck git back by midnight—or a little after. That's quicker an' goin' ter Busby or Chilton.

JOHN [*shakes his head*]: Don't bother ter do nothin' like that.

BILL: Hells-fire, thar ain't no use takin' chances.

JOHN: Kin yuh drive that road at night?

BILL: I drove it when yuh couldn't see yuh're hand before yuh're nose.

[JOHN *closes his eyes as though yielding to weakness and pain. Suddenly he opens them, with a look of fear, and clutches* BILL's *arm tightly.*]

JOHN: Bill—!

BILL: Yeah—?

JOHN: Git down to O'Fallon's with the lantern—as fast as yuh kin—!

BILL: Jist a minute. I want to tell Marthy whar I'm goin' after.

MARTHA [*from the next room, left*]: Oh, Gawd, oh, Gawd! Ain't we never goin' to have it easy? Ain't it ever goin' to be nothin' but trouble, an' accidents an' death? Oh, Gawd!

JOHN [*sinks back on the bed*]: Listen to her, Bill! Jist listen! [*Is now perceptibly weaker.*] That's the way she goes on when anything happens to me. Yuh see, she ain't got no one else now. She—she's a good—woman—! Faithful—an' hard workin' an' kind—! They—Gawd, listen! They don't make 'em—no better. But—but life seems to be—gittin' too much fer her. She—she don't stop—don't stop to figur' things out. I—I was careless— Same as this time maybe—when I hurt my hand. An' if we'd been more careful—we had-a right to be—'bout the water at Ulm, little Harry 'ud still be alive. The—the company ain't no charity organization.

It's allus done the best it could fer me. Them people back east, an' the passengers on the limited, an' these har mountains an' the snow—they ain't got nothin' to do with our bad luck. [MARTHA *wails mournfully.*] But she—[*Shakes his head despairingly.*] Yuh can't make 'em reason it out—logical-like to a finish. Now an' then, they seem ter git the whole lay-out twisted—an' grab at things. [*In a hoarse whisper.*] It's—it's the tiger in 'em, Bill! The tiger in 'em!

BILL [*nods*]: Yuh can't figur' 'em. But I wouldn't bother 'bout that now.

[MARTHA *enters carrying the bag of hops.* BILL *rises.* MARTHA *bends over and carefully places the bag at* JOHN'S *side. He moans, makes an effort to smile, then closes his eyes. She notes that he has grown weaker, and feels his pulse.*]

BILL [*in an undertone, pointing over his shoulder*]: Guess I'll be travelin'.

[*She gives a quick nod and he picks up the lantern.*]

MARTHA [*turns and calls*]: Bill—! [*He pauses and she hurries to his side.*] His—his pulse is awful weak—an' unsteady—! An'—an' Gawd—the way he's breathin'—!

BILL: He's in kind-a bad shape, Marthy.

MARTHA [*they speak in undertones*]: This is turrible. We oughter have a doctor—quick.

BILL: I'm goin' to Hooper Springs an' fetch Doc Fletcher—as soon as I stop this har train—

[MARTHA *gazes at* JOHN.]

MARTHA: How—how long'll it take yuh ter git him —d'yuh think?

BILL: With luck I'll git back by midnight.

[MARTHA *stands in tense thought.* BILL *consults his watch.*]

MARTHA [*impulsively*]: The—the limited may be an hour or two late. Yuh kin never tell. Sometimes she's right on the dot an' then agin she ain't—!

BILL: Well—of course—figurin' that way—

MARTHA [*grabs his arm*]: Go on an' git the Doc—an' I'll give her the "high ball."

BILL: Yuh'll git out an' swing it—?

[*Points at the lantern.*]

MARTHA: Done it twict before—when John was laid up with sciatica.

BILL: Go hikin' down them tracks with the wind blowin' forty-mile an' hour?

MARTHA: I done it already, I tell yuh—onct after a blizzard when the snow plow was stuck in the cut by Shimmer's. Went down to O'Fallon's an' give 'em the "high ball." An' onct I stood on a rock out thar by the tracks an' give it to 'em. On a clare night—like this—the engineer kin see two miles down the canyon—an' they allus whistle an' slow up east of O'Fallon's.

BILL: Well—if yuh figur' yuh kin do it, all right—

[*Sets the lantern back on the box.*]

MARTHA: I could almost set it in the window an' they'd see it. [*With a cry of despair.*] He's so bad off, Bill—don't yuh see—! [*Wrings her hands.*] I never seen him worse. Oh, Gawd! A half hour might make all the difference in the world.

BILL [*in low, sympathetic tones*]: Jist as yuh say, Marthy.

MARTHA: Mighty good-a yuh ter go, Bill—!

BILL: 'Tain't nothin' at all. Good-by. I'll git back as soon as ever I kin.

MARTHA: I know yuh will. Good-by. [BILL *hurries out into the night.* MARTHA *sits on the side of bed, bending over* JOHN.] Honey—!

[JOHN *opens his eyes and gazes at her, dazed.*]

JOHN: That—that yuh, Marthy—?

MARTHA: Yes, yes. How d'yuh feel now?

JOHN: A-all right—all right—but—[*Breaks off and smiles faintly.*] Slides—yuh kin never tell—when they're comin'—Yuh kin never tell—

MARTHA: Don't yuh try to talk!

JOHN [*gradually growing delirious*]: Never—never got caught before. Allus think-a—poor Hogan—who got carried down with his engine!— If the roadbed thar—at Flathead hadn't been soft—it 'ud never happened. Roadbed—roadbed—that's—that's what Nicholson used ter say. 'Member—Marthy, it's the best road—in the country, now—A—a great link 'tween east an' west—an' to the Gateway of the Orient—! The—the great steel trail—ter—ter Asia! Heavier rails though—if they're goin' ter put them giant "hogs" on the mountain division.

MARTHA: Thar, thar, honey.

JOHN: Rails—rails—rails—an' steel goin' up—! They—they say the Japan trade is goin' ter pick up in the spring—. But—but me an' you'll keep the road clare—won't we, Marthy? Let 'em send a

dozen extras through. We'll do it! We gotta do it. Greatest road in the world. A—a great arter—

MARTHA: Honey—please stop—!

JOHN [*he rises up, struggling to get his breath*]: Marthy—I—yuh an' me—

MARTHA [*puts her arm about him*]: Lie down, honey —yuh ain't—!

[*She tries to force him back on the bed, but he struggles desperately.*]

JOHN [*breathing with great effort*]: Gotta git over ter—ter the shops, Marthy—Joe—Joe Ferriss'll be wonderin' why I ain't back—

MARTHA: Hush! Hush! Yuh ain't seen Joe in thirty year—

JOHN: He—he's thar at the shop—now—

[*He gives up the effort to sit up. He sinks limply back in her arms. He tries to speak, but is unable to. He struggles for breath. His body twitches and his face becomes distorted with pain. After a little while he grows calm, and his breathing seems to become easier. He looks up at her with an expression of great placidity and a faint smile plays over his face.*]

JOHN [*in a whisper*]: Marthy—yuh allus been—my—

[*He breaks off, his eyes close and his head sinks on his chest.* MARTHA *stares at him in dumb horror, then gives a cry of passionate anguish, lets his body sink on the bed and leaps to her feet.*]

MARTHA [*in a hoarse, frantic wail*]: Oh, Gawd—! Oh—oh! [*She presses her hands tightly against her*

forehead and closes her eyes.] Oh! Oh! What shall I do? What am I goin' to do? [*She drops to her knees at the side of the bed, stretches out her arms and babbles hysterically.*] John! John! Yuh ain't goin' ter leave yuh're Marthy— Oh, John—don't leave me—don't! Thar ain't nobody else! John! Oh, Gawd, don't take him from me! He's all I got—all that's left! Oh! Oh! Oh, Gawd, don't take him from me! [*With mad fervor.*] Oh, Gawd, don't take him from me! [*From far off comes the sound of a train whistle—very faint.* MARTHA *does not hear it.*] John! Open yuh're eyes an' look at me! Look at yuh're Marthy an' smile! [*She jumps to her feet with clenched hands and an expression of tigerish challenge.*] Thar ain't no Gawd! Thar ain't no Gawd! If—if thar is one he's a black-hearted divil! That's what he is! I curse Him—an' His world—an' all the people in it! [*The whistle sounds again in the distance—a little louder this time.*] Curse Him! Curse Him! Curse Him! [*Again the whistle sounds. She pauses and listens in a daze. A prolonged blast—and still louder. She realizes suddenly that the limited is coming up the canyon. She jumps to the center table, turns down the oil lamp, staggers to the window and peers out. She stands for a moment or two, then swiftly picks up the red lantern and moves to the door. She puts her hand on the knob, then faces about. Her eyes rove about the room and she presents a picture of utter, tragic woe. The whistle again—still nearer. She stands tense, listening, then she whispers hoarsely.*] At—at the edge of the canyon—blowin' fer O'Fallon's—

[*Her eyes wander to the bed—she stares fixedly at the still form lying there. Suddenly she gives a wild cry, raises the lantern in the air, and smashes it down across the back of a chair. The light vanishes.* MARTHA *moves unsteadily to the window and back to center table. The whistle sounds again—shrill and penetrating. A shaft of light shoots in the window and dances about on the wall over the bed. A long, loud blast of the limited's whistle quite near. The shaft of light grows larger and brighter. Suddenly it strikes* MARTHA *full in the face, revealing an expression of insane hate and fear.* MARTHA *gives way to an outburst of wild laughter. The train thunders past the house, then comes the sound of a tremendous crash, as it dives into the slide and is wrecked.* MARTHA *gives a piercing shriek, puts her hands over her ears, and sinks to the floor.*]

CURTAIN

CHARIVARI

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CHARIVARI

by

Nan Bagby Stephens

CHARACTERS

Jean, old butler to Madame Castillon.

Masked Stranger, leader of the charivari, a mock serenade.

Marie, elderly housekeeper to Madame Castillon.

Madame Castillon, an aristocratic Creole, until very recently Madame Don Andres Almonaster.

M. Castillon, French Consul to New Orleans.

Time: *Morning of a spring day, March,* 1804.

Place: *Drawing-room of Madame Castillon's home, New Orleans.*

Scene: *A splendid, thronelike room, furnished in Spanish style. Long windows at the back reach to the floor and open on a gallery which looks on the street. Spring flowers and lavish decorations are everywhere. Sunlight through the windows floods the back of the stage, revealing the richness of this stately room in the home of a great chevalier, late chief citizen of New Orleans, who has left to his widow not only a large fortune but the respect and affection of the whole city.*

A violent noise is heard in the street below. Bells, catcalls, horns, drums, make a dreadful accompaniment to strident chants and mocking laughter.

Enter JEAN, *dignified old French butler, his expression a curious mingling of terror and satisfaction. He pauses and his knees knock as he glances over his shoulder. Then seeing he is alone, he grins, shakes his head, and approaches the window cautiously. What he sees makes him groan and cover his eyes; then he leans out and beckons. A masked face looks in and a hand claps him on the shoulder as a friend.* JEAN *expostulates in pantomime. The* STRANGER *whispers a message.* JEAN *claps his hands in delight. The face disappears. There is a noise in the hall.* JEAN *hurries from the window and tiptoes out by another entrance. Enter* MARIE, *a lower-class Creole. She bustles in with an air of horror, then as she sees the room is empty, her expression, like* JEAN'S, *changes to delight. She hurries to the window and beckons. The same masked face appears, a hand of authority waves a command to the rioters and the noise is lessened, although still audible.*

STRANGER [*sardonically*]: Here we are, Marie.

MARIE: Oh, M'sieu! How terrible! How brave of you!

STRANGER: Strange to see you in here. You seem so much a part of the garden—such a messenger of

happiness—[MARIE's *pitying hand is on his arm. He shrugs.*] So you're back from Paris.

MARIE: Yes, M'sieu. Madame and her new husband—

STRANGER: Ah, yes, the new husband. And are they pleased with his welcome?

MARIE: Oh, M'sieu. It's wicked! [STRANGER *laughs.*] And wonderful! I rejoice in it.

STRANGER [*suddenly tender*]: Marie, what news—of Micaela?

MARIE: Poor lamb—still weeping when we left. That was wicked, M'sieu. Oh, when I think of all that's done—Madame should pay heavily.

STRANGER: No word for me?

MARIE [*pulling note from pocket*]: Ah, yes, M'sieu. And there will be more—

> [*The* STRANGER *seizes the note. At a noise in the hall* MARIE *warns him. He disappears.* JEAN *returns. The noise outside increases as the* STRANGER *leaves the window.* MARIE *regards* JEAN *with suspicion, but his mask of concern deceives her. Her face expresses malicious pleasure. She picks up her rustling silk skirts and turns an ancient pirouette.*]

MARIE [*beaming*]: Charivari! Charivari! It's upon us, Jean. It's come.

JEAN [*groans as he glances at her*]: If you'd stayed in New Orleans it wouldn't have happened. Disgrace to this house! Disgrace!

MARIE [*hurries to window*]: Is it *your* charivari the city's celebrating? Your long face? Your groans? Pouf!

JEAN: For shame, woman. Gloating over misfortune.

MARIE [*looking at him like a naughty old parrot*]: Gloat! Who said gloat! You knew the people would not let Madame—off lightly. Marrying again—at her age. That young whippersnapper. [JEAN *warns her to be quiet.*] Oh, they'll never hear me! That din outside—with their own sighs and coos—Bah!

JEAN: Yesterday at the wedding feast Madame was as blushing a bride as if she were sixteen—again.

MARIE: Such an actress. All those years the model wife, the model mother, the model widow. Now look! What's come over her? No dignity—no—no—

JEAN: Mamselle Micaela's fine wedding put marriage in her mother's head. You know it didn't begin until the bride and groom were safe in Paris. Maybe loneliness—

MARIE: Pouf! Madame is never lonely. She wanted a young lover and she got herself one. A Paris dandy, who doesn't understand our language, or our food, or our clothes—a boy young enough for her son. I'd like to join the charivari and hoot them both, so I would!

JEAN: Marie! Marie! Quiet, I say. Remember Madame's temper—

MARIE: Oh, Jean! Come! Look! Citizens—hundreds of them. People from the country—on horseback—in wagons— Oh, this is the greatest charivari in all history. Look, Jean! See Madame in effigy, sitting beside poor old Master. [*Wipes eyes and looks again with relish.*] Oh—that little cadet in

her arms. Even Madame must recognize that as our new Master. Oh, won't she rage!

JEAN [*eyeing her*]: Dreadful! Dreadful! I thought the populace loved our old Master.

MARIE: Donkey! They do love him. They resent Madame's fickle heart.

JEAN: Hardly fickle. She's been widow a long time. [*Complacently.*] I'd say it was something else.

MARIE [*suspiciously*]: Oh, you would! What is it, then? [JEAN *shrugs.*] You don't know what you're talking about. I say it's fickle. Better for her if she'd married sooner. One thought of her as settled. It's too great a shock. He but twenty—she forty-five!

JEAN: There's a young man leading the mob.

MARIE: Why not? The young hate this sort of thing most of all.

JEAN: What about the young master? [MARIE *gives a disgusted shrug.*] He's Consul, Marie! That's dignified enough. Even the French Emperor was once Consul.

MARIE: If M'sieu were Creole the people would forgive it sooner. Listen—that song about Don Andres and Madame. Oh, I hope she hears it!

JEAN: Marie! You're jealous.

MARIE: Jealous—Bah! I loved our old Master. I resent a stranger's taking his place—his widow. Oh, Madame must be made to understand.

JEAN [*chuckles:*] She will.

[*The noise increases. Both servants clap their hands to their ears.* MARIE'S *eyes shine.* JEAN *grins. They try to talk but the din is too great, and they resort to eager gestures.*

Enter MADAME CASTILLON, *a Creole of the haute noblesse.* MADAME *is forty-five, and very beautiful except for a spoiled, pettish manner. Now she is angry, her bearing imperious, her eyes blazing.*]

MARIE [*obsequiously*]: Good morning, Madame!

JEAN: Good morning, Madame!

MADAME: It is the worst morning of my life. Jean, what is that noise? What is it? Can't you speak?

MARIE: Yes, Madame. It is your charivari.

JEAN: Charivari!

MADAME: Charivari! My charivari!

[*Her servants, afraid, edge away from her.*]

MARIE: Madame knows the old custom—when a widow marries—

MADAME: They dare to mock me! Me! [*She shudders as the noise increases.*] It sounds like the Revolution! What are they singing? Oh, oh! The ruffians! Toads! Jean, close the windows.

MARIE: Oh, Madame, charivari crowds throw bricks —the glass, Madame!

MADAME [*silencing her*]: Jean, close the windows.

JEAN [*whimpers*]: Yes, Madame.

[JEAN *closes one window. As he starts for another, a brick is hurled through the glass of the closed window.* JEAN *falls on his knees, quaking.* MARIE *looks at her mistress in grim satisfaction.* MADAME *for the first time senses the spirit beneath the mob's ribald jesting. Her eyes question* MARIE, *who nods slowly.*]

MARIE: They mean for Madame to hear—everything.

MADAME [*bitterly*]: When I remember what we have done for this city. The Cathedral. The Cabildo. The schools. The customhouse. Were they not all built by Don Andres? These wretches who enjoy his legacies insult his widow!

MARIE: They say Madame is no longer widow of the city's benefactor—but Madame Castillon.

MADAME: Toads! Toads! . . . What if I am? Must I answer to them? [*The song outside grows louder.*] What are they saying?

MARIE: They say that M'sieu Castillon is young enough for Madame's son. That he married Madame for her money even as she married the good Don Andres of blessed memory. All is fair in love —and war!

MADAME: How dare you repeat such insults! Oh, if M'sieu should hear. I'll stop this. I'll send for the militia. The knaves will cool their heels in the calaboose!

MARIE: Has Madame seen the mob? There are not enough cells to hold them all.

JEAN: Oh Madame, the temper of the mob is like powder. They are armed, fearless. Wiser to placate—

MADAME: Placate! Never! I am insulted! They shall pay!

JEAN: Better for Madame to pay. Give them an entertainment to celebrate her wedding. Send them off in good humor.

MADAME: Never! Never!

JEAN [*slyly*]: But M'sieu Castillon! They will run him through on the point of a bayonet. The poor young gentleman from France—to be killed in a

strange country—because he had the honor to love Madame.

MADAME [*after a struggle*]: What do the wretches want?

JEAN: They have not named the sum, Madame.

MARIE: They won't give up their fun so soon—not they. [*She sees* MADAME *shrink.*] Sometimes a charivari lasts a whole week—when a widow is as distinguished as Madame!

MADAME: There must be a leader. Go, Jean. Talk with him. Mind, I am not willing to spend a fortune to feast those ruffians. They should be in the calaboose. Keep that before them!

JEAN: Yes, Madame.

[*He goes out.*]

MADAME [*paces the floor*]: I shall go to the Governor. They shall pay—

MARIE: Madame can not get through the crowd. Every door is guarded. The other servants ran away when the shouting began. Jean and I are the only ones here. [MADAME *stops, staring at her.*] Madame may never leave this house again! The militia stand against that mob? Pouf! Madame is at their mercy. Perhaps M'sieu Castillon—as French Consul—

MADAME: M'sieu shall not be dragged into this. They would kill him. [MARIE *nods.*] Stop agreeing with me. Have you no help to offer?

MARIE: I am afraid of mobs, Madame.

MADAME [*suddenly suspicious*]: I believe you wish to frighten me. You are no comfort at all. Oh, the wretches! Marie! *Do* I look old?

MARIE: Madame is as fresh as a rose! She looks but little older than Mamselle Micaela!

MADAME: Does my—Does M'sieu Castillon look young enough for my son? The truth, Marie!

MARIE: Surely M'sieu is a man grown. How could he look the son of one who appears no older than Mamselle—

MADAME: No longer Mamselle—Madame, Marie. Madame Celestin de Pontalba—the sweet bride.

MARIE: The little angel! The poor lamb!

MADAME: No angel. Micaela has my temper, my intellect, too, but unfortunately she resembles her revered father.

MARIE [*flattering*]: Micaela was never one-half as lovely as you were at her age.

[*A ribald shout makes both women cover their ears.*]

MADAME: Oh, if the Pontalbas hear of this. The Baron detests me. How he would laugh!

MARIE: The Baron laughs at everything except his son, M'sieu Celestin.

MADAME: The beautiful lad! Such a bridegroom! Ah, what a fortunate marriage for Micaela! Birth, fortune, beauty—

MARIE: Yet she went to the altar weeping.

MADAME: Cried her eyes out for a fortune hunter from San Domingo! Handsome, I dare say! I never saw him. What does a child of sixteen know of love?

MARIE: Mamselle Micaela was a woman in intellect.

MADAME: Nothing of the sort. Brilliant in books—ah, yes—but a child in discretion. [*In relief.*] She is safe enough now—with dear Celestin—in the

Baron's beautiful chateau. My precious children! I must go to them soon—very soon.

MARIE: Madame does not know what became of the young gentleman Mamselle Micaela loved?

MADAME: Why should I know? The vulgar adventurer! Marie—that song in the street said I married Don Andres for his money just as M'sieu Castillon married me. How awful!

[JEAN *enters the room, heavy with defeat.* MADAME *frowns.*]

MARIE [*with ill concealed glee*]: Jean brings good news for Madame.

JEAN: Bad news, Madame. Bad news.

MADAME [*impatiently*]: What bad news?

JEAN: I spoke with the leader—a young man, Madame. The crowd is his. He demands that Madame pay for her happiness. Three thousand dollars.

MADAME: Three thousand dollars! Never! Never! Never!

JEAN: Oh, Madame, they are organized—merciless. They will stay here forever unless they are paid. If Madame could see the young man who leads them.

MADAME: Bandit!

MARIE: Indeed, Madame, if people keep coming to your charivari it will take twice three thousand dollars to feast them.

MADAME: I will pay no gang of thieves three thousand dollars to torment me.

MARIE: Charivari is a great honor, Madame. It is the custom.

MADAME: My traveling bag, Marie. M'sieu's luggage is not yet unpacked. We will drive to the plantation!

MARIE [*wickedly*]: Yes, Madame. [*She goes out.*]
MADAME: Jean, tell Pomp to fetch the carriage.
JEAN: Pomp has fled, Madame—long ago.
MADAME: Then you must hitch the horses. Quick, Jean! Fetch them to the side gate.
JEAN: The side gate is guarded. The mob will never let the carriage pass.
MADAME: Jean! This is no ordinary charivari. Some one who hates me is at the bottom of it.
JEAN: Who could hate Madame? They say Madame is the richest woman in Louisiana. She can afford to be generous to the populace when she weds.
MADAME: Traitors! Don Andres spoiled them—taught them to expect all and give nothing. Oh, I am the most persecuted woman alive!
JEAN: If Madame would offer something to the charivari—perhaps they might have pity—
MADAME: Pity—on Madame Don Andres Almonaster!
JEAN: No, Madame, on Madame Castillon.
MADAME: Hold your tongue! We shall leave, if we have to disguise ourselves. That's a good thought. Jean, guard the doors.
JEAN: There are many doors, Madame—and only one of me.
MADAME: The front doors, fool.
JEAN: Yes, Madame.

[*He goes out.* MADAME *paces the floor, angry and rather frightened. The song about her age begins again.* MADAME *stops her ears, then with dread and curiosity listens, claps her hands again to her ears, and turns anxiously to the mirror. Enter* MONSIEUR

RAOUL CASTILLON, *French Consul, bridegroom, a dapper youth of twenty, rather exquisite in type. His eyes are round with wonder at the noise outside.*]

CASTILLON: Louison!

MADAME: Oh, Raoul, Raoul, save me!

RAOUL: Save you from what, my Treasure?

MADAME: Don't call me your Treasure! [*Seeing his hurt wonder.*] What am I saying? The noise distracts me.

RAOUL: They sound angry out there. What does it mean, Louison?

MADAME: It is the custom of New Orleans to celebrate a marriage. They torment bride and groom until a ransom is paid. They demand from us three thousand dollars!

RAOUL: But that is a king's ransom. Impossible!

MADAME: They will not leave without it.

RAOUL: Then let them remain, by all means.

MADAME: Then we must flee.

RAOUL: I am yours, *mon ange*. Summon the carriage.

MADAME: The mob allows no carriage, we go on foot, disguised.

RAOUL: Adventure! Delightful.

MADAME [*grimly, pointing to the window*]: Perhaps. Look, Raoul!

[RAOUL *peers out, shudders, and hurries downstage.*]

RAOUL: Louison! They *are* angry! They have you in effigy—with your former husband—and I—a little boy in your arms. The likeness is perfect! [*Laughs nervously.*] Oh, the rogues!

MADAME: They are dangerous. They will stop at nothing.

RAOUL: I am but one, Louison. I cannot fight hundreds. Perhaps you *had* better buy them off.

MADAME: *I* buy them off? Are you not my husband?

RAOUL: The ransom is for you—never for a poor Frenchman like me.

[*The noise increases.*]

MADAME: Listen, do you hear what they are saying? Oh, you don't understand the patois. Well, I do. It says you are young enough to be my son. You married me for my money.

RAOUL: Louison! No, you do not mean it. This is horrible. We must do something. Yet how can I fight them all?

MADAME: Eh, you'd rather fight than part with your money!

RAOUL: One must fight when one has no money.

MADAME: You are miserly.

RAOUL: Silence. It is *you*, you have millions. If *I* had millions I'd never let you suffer. It is cruel, devastating, to love.

MADAME: Oh, oh! That I should live to hear this from my own husband.

RAOUL: Louison! Louison! Forgive me. You angered me—wounded my pride—

MADAME: What about *my* pride? You do not deny you married me for money. You do not once say it was for love—because I am beautiful.

RAOUL: I say it now. You *are* beautiful, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. I adore you.

MADAME: [*melting*]: But I *am* old enough for your

mother! Micaela is almost your age. My daughter Andrea who died—even older— Oh. Oh!

RAOUL: I have said you are beautiful, that you look as young as your own daughter. What more can I say? Why should I have married you unless I adored you?

MADAME: [*intent on her own thoughts*]: Don Andres was an angel of goodness—I never regretted—but I always wondered how it would be to marry one my own age.

RAOUL: Louison, you are fascinating. Don't let that poison outside influence you.

MADAME: It has set me thinking. I remember how Mamselle Lustral looked at you in the Cathedral. At our wedding feast your eyes were all for those young girls who danced. [*With new suspicion.*] Can these sweethearts of yours be responsible for this charivari?

RAOUL: Nonsense.

MADAME: It would be like them—little wretches.

RAOUL: It would be more like your suitors—some of Don Andres' old friends.

MADAME: You are careful to give me only ancient suitors, my friend! Am I so withered, so unsightly that I attract only mummies?

RAOUL: Louison, Louison, if we quarrel like this after twenty-four hours, what shall we do in twenty-four years?

MADAME: Twenty-four years! I'll be sixty—no—seventy—and you will be forty-five, already wondering how much longer old Louison will torment you by living.

RAOUL: I never saw you like this. This vulgar

charivari has put nonsense in your head. Let us escape, Louison. It destroys all the glamour when we quarrel.

MADAME: [*pulls the bellcord sharply*]: Gladly, Raoul. But the disguise. We must turn our cloaks —wear old hats—stoop with stiff joints.

[MARIE *enters with* MADAME'S *bonnet and wrap and* RAOUL'S *hat and cape.*]

RAOUL [*laughs*]: Turn the bonnet too, my Love. Even the mob will know it for Paris.

MARIE: A cap for M'sieu. That tall hat would go in a flash—

MADAME: You will know where to find us, Marie—at the plantation.

MARIE: Yes, Madame. You can't carry the luggage so far. Jean had better go.

[*A louder shout from the outside and some one leaps on the balcony.*]

MADAME: Hush! What is that?

[*They gaze at one another in terror as the blinds are suddenly burst open and the masked stranger steps through the window. He smiles bitterly as he surveys the trembling group.*]

STRANGER: Just in time. [*Bows to* MADAME.] The beautiful bride—[*bows to* RAOUL]—and the equally beautiful bridegroom are starting on their honeymoon. I wish them joy.

MADAME: Who are you, M'sieu?

STRANGER: A stranger to Madame. One who is destined to cross her path not once—but twice.

MADAME: What do you mean? I have never seen you before.

STRANGER: Nor will you see me again—after the charivari. Until then I shall hope to be with you constantly. You are not leaving, Madame. Every gate is closely watched. You could not take a step outside your door. The mob is impatient. It would please them better if they could put you in the cart instead of your straw figure.

MADAME: They would not dare!

STRANGER: A mob, Madame, dares anything. They have sent me to speak for them. Madame must not misunderstand. Yours is the greatest charivari in all history. Don Andres was our benefactor. Madame must respect our grief at seeing a stranger take his place. The city must mourn Don Andres properly, and mourn the fickleness of widows who are eager to forget.

MADAME: Raoul! Will you allow this insult to go unchallenged?

RAOUL: I do not understand the fellow's patois.

MADAME: Fool!

STRANGER: Not fool, Madame. Stranger. I must speak a better French. M'sieu will, in time, understand his own charivari. He can no more escape than Madame can escape old age. Look outside, Madame. The people are coming in greater numbers. It will last forever unless Madame ends it as advised.

MADAME: Never.

STRANGER: Think well, Madame. Your income is estimated at forty thousand. Is not your happiness worth less than one-tenth? Madame will in so doing proclaim her bliss by a great banquet—she will feast the poor of the city.

MADAME: Have I not given unstintedly to the poor —built churches, schools, orphanages?

STRANGER: These gifts were from Don Andres. The charivari defends his memory. [*He sees how stubborn she is and laughs mockingly.*] Madame's unbenefactions are famous in the city. Did she not deny the gift of love to her only child? For the sake of a brilliant marriage did she not tear Micaela from the arms of her lover and marry her to a cousin from France?

MADAME: How dare you?

STRANGER [*pain evident in his mockery*]: Perhaps Madame thought a good mother must save her child from a poor love. But she sent Micaela away poorer still—a beggar, Madame—in spite of her millions.

MADAME: Who are you?

STRANGER: Does Madame think the whole city does not know? Perhaps the charivari is to mourn the selling of Micaela—the death of her true love—

MADAME: I shall have you hanged!

STRANGER: It would not be worth Madame's trouble. Remember the three thousand dollars will not greatly matter to the populace outside. The weather is mild. They are entertained so well it would take a magnificent feast to content them. They will presently enter for food, for a sight of the mansion of the bride.

MADAME: Leave my house!

STRANGER: I am patient. For Don Andres' sake, for Micaela's, I will give Madame a second chance. But think quickly. I cannot hold the mob much longer. Au revoir. [*Bows, then snaps his fingers at* RAOUL.] And M'sieu, the little bridegroom, au revoir!

[*With a laugh he springs lightly through the window, closing the blinds after him.* MADAME, *frowning, allows* MARIE *to take off the bonnet and wrap.* RAOUL *gives her his cape. She goes toward the door.*]

MADAME: Marie, who is that ruffian? Have you even seen him before?

MARIE: He was masked, Madame.

MADAME: You could tell from his figure, from his chin, his voice—

MARIE: Oh, Madame, I see only the servants and the guests here.

MADAME: He knew our family secrets.

MARIE: The family of a great man like Don Andres can have no secrets.

MADAME: Silence!

MARIE: Yes, Madame.

[*She goes out, smiling maliciously.*]

RAOUL: Louison!

MADAME: *Don't* speak to me. This is my reward for marrying a child. You took the fellow's insults like an utter fool.

RAOUL: Don't speak like a fishwife.

MADAME: Oh, oh! I'll never forgive you!

RAOUL: What did the fellow say to you?

MADAME: He insulted us both over and over! And you stood there gaping. A New Orleans gentleman would cut him in pieces for the half of it. Coward! Coward!

RAOUL: I am no coward. But when one does not understand how can one grow angry enough to fight?

MADAME: A Creole fights whether he understands or not. He takes no chances. I can never hold up

my head again. I, who have so long ruled the city.
RAOUL: Must I also remind you, Louison, that I did not seek this marriage? You sought me. You sent Marie to bring me to you in your moonlit garden. You were so far away, so magnificent. I should sooner have dared for the stars.
MADAME: This is the crowning blow. Think what you imply. Oh, I never wish to see you again!
RAOUL: Louison, you are so fascinating when you are gentle. So terrible when you are harsh. Don't destroy our happiness. Let us enjoy our honeymoon.
MADAME: Enjoy this!
RAOUL: You said you loved me more than life itself until this charivari began. Forget it, my angel. Treat it as a joke.
MADAME: A Creole would not find it so amusing. Oh, I do not deserve this torture. How can they be so revengeful? It is all that fellow. He put mischief in their heads. It was he who planned this charivari. Oh, I wish he were in a kettle of hot oil!
RAOUL: But he isn't in a kettle of hot oil. He's just outside, waiting. Forget him. Fly to Paris with me, Louison.
MADAME: Fly with you when all the doors are guarded?
RAOUL: The ransom will open them. Think, my own. Paris—love—enchantment—
MADAME [*nastily*]: You understand Creole money at any rate.
RAOUL [*biting his lips*]: I will not quarrel. There is a ship to-day leaving for Marseilles. Let us sail before your friends learn of this. When we return all will be forgotten.

MADAME: As long as Creoles live this charivari will be history.

RAOUL: In Paris it will not be known. Come, Louison. You shall go to Mont L'Evêque and visit Micaela.

MADAME: If I were sure— [*She studies him, then goes to her secretary, unlocks it, takes out two bags of gold and hands them to* RAOUL.] Pay, then. I will not do it. I have sworn.

RAOUL: Ah, Louison darling! We shall be happy once this is over.

MADAME: I wonder. [*A shout from outside—another snatch of the same mocking song.* MADAME *turns to* RAOUL *and her fingers close over the gold.*] Give it back, Raoul. They shall not insult me so.

RAOUL: Be reasonable, Louison!

[*The* STRANGER *springs again through the window in time to see* RAOUL *struggling with* MADAME *for the gold.*]

STRANGER: Aye, be reasonable, Madame. For the first time in all your life!

[MADAME *falls back, staring at* STRANGER.]

RAOUL [*offering the gold*]: See, M'sieu. Here is your ransom.

STRANGER [*accepting with a bow to* MADAME]: A wise decision—and yours, M'sieu, not Madame's. Perhaps in time you may be able to manage your elderly wife!

RAOUL [*bowing*]: Pardon, M'sieu, I do not understand Creole.

STRANGER: And you never will, my friend. Madame, now— [MADAME *turns her back and walks away.*] Madame grows ill tempered with

love. M'sieu had better join the charivari. At least he will feast on food and not on the will of a tempestuous widow. That is bitter bread, M'sieu.

RAOUL: I do not understand, M'sieu.

STRANGER: You will understand some day, as Madame understands now. She cannot order other lives and bend other wills without the charivari of —Retribution!

MADAME [*wheeling*]: Retribution!

STRANGER: Aye, think, Madame. Micaela—in France! [*His voice breaks.*] In a splendid house —but with an empty heart! Retribution, Madame, for that—and charivari for two widows instead of one. M'sieu, I thank you for the populace outside. They will indeed feast at your expense, poor lad. Farewell.

[*Bowing again, he springs through the window and closes the blinds. A shout and more singing is heard, then a sudden calm.* RAOUL *approaches* MADAME *and takes her in his arms.*]

RAOUL: My Love!

MADAME [*suspiciously*]: Raoul! Are you sure you understand not one word of Creole?

RAOUL: Not one word, my dear. Shall I ring for Marie? The ship—

MADAME: Just a moment— [*She lays her head on* RAOUL'S *breast but only for a moment. All the distrust born of the charivari is in her face.*] Raoul, if I were a poor widow, twice your age, with no dower, would you have married me?

RAOUL: You are but one day old since I married you!

MADAME [*pleased*]: No wonder you have medals for fencing, my Love!

RAOUL: This hideous charivari—let us forget this day, Louison. Everything but that we are sailing for France.

[*Enter* MARIE *and* JEAN *in excitement.*]

JEAN: Madame, the guards are gone from the doors. The people are leaving the Square. We are free!

MARIE: The town will be wild to-night.

MADAME: Marie, the stranger who came in here—Think, Marie. Have you ever taken notes to a young man—for Micaela?

MARIE [*fairly caught*]: Oh, Madame. It was always dark. I never saw his face!

MADAME [*musingly*]: I thought so. A double charivari for two widows!

MARIE: The greatest charivari in all history, Madame.

RAOUL: We sail for France to-day, Marie.

MARIE: Oh, M'sieu—Mamselle Micaela— [*Her glance goes to the window through which the* STRANGER *disappeared.*] Yes, M'sieu—I will get the luggage ready.

[*She looks to* MADAME *for orders, but* MADAME, *her head on* RAOUL'S *shoulder, pays no attention to her.* MARIE *goes out quietly, followed by* JEAN. RAOUL, *obviously disenchanted, leans over* MADAME *with assumed tenderness. He sighs.*]

RAOUL: Still dreaming of your charivari, my Louison—or of your Raoul?

CURTAIN

KILLS-WITH-HER-MAN

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KILLS-WITH-HER-MAN

by

Hartley Alexander

CHARACTERS

Cheyenne Man, former husband of Faggot Woman
Faggot Woman, adopted captive of the Blackfeet
Young Hawk, Blackfoot son of Faggot Woman

Place: *A grove in the Blackfoot country.*

Scene: *The scene opens toward evening, with twilight illumination, passing into ruddy, as the action suggests it, then ominous gloom, deep dusk, and at the close the cold light of the rising moon, suggested by the beam that falls upon the newly taken scalp, and upon the final action. The drum may be employed, at the opening with a roll, at the close with a single sharp figure, and in the singing and soliloquy moments for rhythm and accent. The mask, however, may be performed without use of the drum. Costumes should also be simple.* Cheyenne Man *is a captive, nearly naked, hair di-*

sheveled. During most of the act his arms are bound by a rope around the two elbows, drawing the arms back. Faggot Woman *wears a single-piece gown, tied at the waist with a colorless band; she enters with a huge bundle of faggots, supported by a head-band and pack-strap.* Young Hawk *alone wears ornament, although this is merely a plume in his roached-up scalp-lock, and perhaps bracelets and neck-ornament; he carries a warclub.*

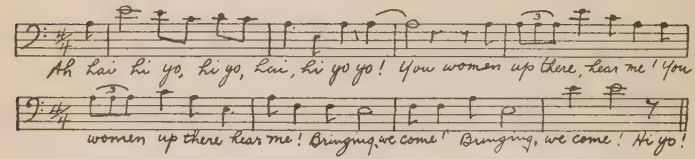
Faggot Woman [*enters, bearing upon her shoulders a huge bundle of faggots, which she deposits wearily*]:

Ai! . . . Work. . . .
I am Faggot Woman! . . . Bearer. . . .
What have I not borne! . . . Hu! . . .
Faggots . . . burdens . . . children. . . .
[*With sudden fire*]:
Awa! Children! . . .
Who knows now? Rabbit Boy, my little Cheyenne!
Man, now. . . .
His father . . . ah, he forgets!
What is a woman that a man should remember!
Children she bears him. . . .
Rabbit Boy . . . hu! he was a quick arrow!
And Little Turtle, too—some man's wife, now. . . .
I made dolls for her, and she wove a cradle from the willow. . . .
Little Turtle. . . .
[*Wearily again and with longing*]:
My Cheyenne land, many years I have not seen it!

My Cheyenne people, I shall not see them again. . . .
Rabbit Boy, Little Turtle, would I know them . . . their mother? . . .
No! that man!
Another Cheyenne wife, other children. . . .
Me, he forgets. . . .
Me! Blackfoot woman, now. . . .
Blackfoot woman . . . how many years since they took me here. . . .
Blackfoot woman! and Blackfoot mother! . . .
Young Hawk! what a Blackfoot—my son!
[*With vigor and pride*]:
Oh, that boy! Just now a man! just now a warrior!
That boy will be great Blackfoot—war-chief! council chief!
My Blackfoot son!
[*A quick anxiety, leading into heart-broken dread*]:
Yes . . . on the war path now . . . his first war path!
What people will he fight? Cheyenne people? Rabbit Boy? . . .
Rabbit Boy! That is only a baby name!
Now he will have gotten a man's name! warrior's name! . . .
Maybe, too, his father . . . my man . . . my Cheyenne husband? . . .
Young Hawk, fighting my man! . . .
Oh, Faggot Woman, Faggot Woman . . . unhappy!
[*She sinks beside her bundle of faggots, de-*

spondent. Distantly a sound is heard, the musical cry of triumphant men's voices.]

WARRIOR VOICE [*in victory song*]:



Ah hai hi yo, hi yo, hai, hi yo yo! You women up there, hear me!
You women up there, hear me! Bringing, we come!
Bringing, we come! Hi yo!

FAGGOT WOMAN [*rising abruptly and peering into the distance*]:

Tsu! . . .
Victory song!
The young men come!
Young Hawk! . . .
Yes . . . yes! Young Hawk!
Bringing!

WARRIOR VOICE [*nearer*]:

Ah hai hi yo, hi yo, hai, hi yo yo!
Hear me! Bringing, we come!
Those Cheyenne women weep!
Those Cheyenne women weep!

[*Enter* YOUNG HAWK, *leading captive and bound* CHEYENNE MAN.]

YOUNG HAWK [*exultant*]:

Hai! Blackfeet!
You women—laugh, dance!
Here we come, bringing!

This Cheyenne! thinking to walk in Blackfoot land!
Thinking to be warrior! . . .
[*To the grimly silent captive*]:
Hu! You Cheyenne!
What Blackfoot horse will you ride!
What hair will you take!
What woman will you carry away! . . .
Thinking to be warrior! hu!
[*Again, as to the tribe*]:
Dance, you women! dance! laugh, laugh!
Look at this Cheyenne!
Laugh!
[*To his mother*]:
Hi! Faggot Woman! Young Hawk took him!
Hi!
Show this horsethief how Blackfeet dance!

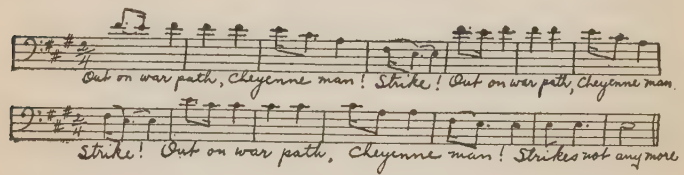
[Faggot Woman, *during this display of triumph, has turned from captor to prisoner once and again. Anxiety, uncertainty, suspicion; then relief as if satisfied of mistake; renewed uncertainty, reassurance—these mark her moods. The prisoner, after a sudden sharp start of recognition, noting her mute denial, sinks back into stolid expressionlessness. At* Young Hawk's *command,* Faggot Woman *begins to dance, with more and more apparent excitement, interjecting cries of triumph, like the sharp barks of a yelping pack.*]

Young Hawk [*forcing the prisoner to his knees and binding his feet to the bundle of faggots*]:

Hu! You Cheyenne!
This woman's pack, good?
Now run! Runner is your Blackfoot name! Hu!

[*He also begins to dance, swinging his war-club as if to strike, and urging* FAGGOT WOMAN *into a more elated rhythm, as he composes his song of triumph.*]

Out on war path, Cheyenne man! Strike! Out on war path, Cheyenne man!
Strike! Out on war path, Cheyenne man! Strike not any more!



[FAGGOT WOMAN *seizes a fallen faggot and dances in the same threatening manner as* YOUNG HAWK, *but nearer and nearer to the bound prisoner. Her manner is outwardly vindictive and savage—the squaw in the victory fever—but there is always a peering uncertainty as she turns with threat or cry toward the prisoner. He, impassive, bound, kneels motionless, but with undaunted head; until suddenly, she dancing near him with upraised club, he tosses his head sharply, as if avoiding the blow, throwing the hair to one side and revealing an old scar.* FAGGOT WOMAN, *eying him closely, sees the scar, catches herself quickly, with a suppressed ex-*

clamation; then, recovering, she continues her threatening dance even more savagely than before.]

YOUNG HAWK [*also noting the gesture of avoidance*]:

Hai, hai!
Afraid of women! This Cheyenne!
Hai, hai! Afraid of women! Big Cheyenne!
Hu!

[*He turns to* FAGGOT WOMAN]:

Hi, Faggot Woman!
This man we leave tied . . . this woman-man that turns his head!
Afterwards something will be done. . . .
Afterwards some one will wear his hair!
Those over there, those Cheyenne people, they will not be too sorry!
Woman-man, they will say, may be Young Hawk wears his hair!
He, who thought to steal from Blackfeet!

[*He examines the thongs that bind the prisoner, and tightens them*]:

Good! You Cheyenne. . . .
Something will be said about you;
Then you will know what is to be done! hu!

[*Again to* FAGGOT WOMAN]:

Young Hawk, your Young Hawk is a warrior!
Now he shall count coup!
Now he shall talk with men!
He shall speak where they will say what to do with this Cheyenne;
The warriors will listen. . . .

It is your Young Hawk who is now a man! . . .
Let us leave this Cheyenne.
He cannot run away! hu!
Come—am I not a warrior! Your Young Hawk!
[*He resumes his chant as he goes out*]:
Ah, hai hi yo, hi yo, hai, hi yo yo!
[Faggot Woman, *without even a glance at the bound prisoner, follows him. Darkness falls.*]
Cheyenne Man [*lifting his head, looks grimly after the departing. He adjusts himself painfully to his bonds; braces his shoulders; throws back his head, defiance and pain uniting.*]
For *that* woman! I!
That is the woman I would steal back—*that!*
She knows . . . yes, she knows . . . her husband once . . . her Cheyenne man. . . .
But she forgets . . . all Blackfoot now . . . Blackfoot. . . .

These years that I think of her!
These years that I watch to find her again!
Never another woman . . . only this one . . . and now!

Yes, I have made the war path . . . for her!
I have gone too far on the war path . . . and for her!
Now, I am here! . . .

Those other women would laugh—
Those Cheyenne women that I would not have,
Thinking of this one only . . . thinking of this one always! . . .

Now, it is over.

[*He ceases abruptly, turning his head sharply, listening*]:

Ay! That Young Hawk comes . . .
To tie more tight. . . . I know.

YOUNG HAWK [*enters, in the gloom, roughly approaching the prisoner*]:

Hu! You Cheyenne!
It is good.
To-morrow you will know.
It is very good. Hu!

[*He examines the bonds, and attaches a lariat to the prisoner's body*]:

Maybe you think running away?
Maybe you think your medicine is very strong?
Help you to break Blackfoot rope?

Not for you, Cheyenne!
I keep you tied just the same as when I take you.
This end *I* keep, yes, while I sleep.
Then you will not run away, Cheyenne man! And to-morrow!

[*He makes the rope very secure*]:

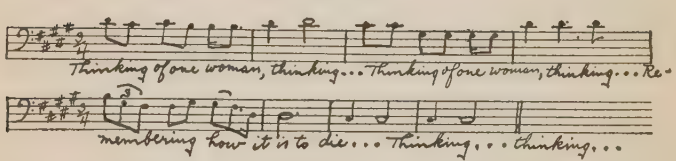
Now speak to yourself.
There is a song to make.
There is singing.
You know *which* song!
I sleep . . . till morning.

[*He withdraws to a distance and lies down in the gloom, falling asleep.*]

CHEYENNE MAN [*makes no sign during all this. But when* YOUNG HAWK *is gone he braces himself again*]:

Yes, he sleeps. . . .
But I, I think I stay . . . here. . . .
It is true, there is a song—
Death singing now.
I came thinking another song . . . about that woman!
Now it is death singing I make. . . .

[*He begins to sing, slowly, composing as he sings*]:



Thinking of one woman, thinking. . . .
Thinking of one woman, thinking.
Remembering how it is to die. . . . Thinking . . . thinking. . . .

[*He pauses as if striving to recover something in memory*]:

Awa!
It is the same . . . the same song. . . .
For *that* woman?
Under the willow, I made it . . . for her . . . this song.
Then it was her song . . . the one I would have her to hear. . . .
Under the willow . . . yes, it is the same. . . .

[*He sings again, reminiscently*]:

Thinking of one woman, thinking. . . .
Remembering how it is to love. . . .

[*He stops abruptly, muttering bitterly*]:
You, woman!
FAGGOT WOMAN [*has approached noiselessly during the singing, listening intently. Now she draws swiftly and mutely near*]:
Tsu!
CHEYENNE MAN [*turning his head*]:
Hu?
FAGGOT WOMAN [*at his side*]:
Cheyenne man, *I* am that woman.
CHEYENNE MAN [*with contempt*]:
You, too! Good!
FAGGOT WOMAN:
Tsu! There are owls! Whisper talk. . . .
I knew you by that scar, my Cheyenne man.
CHEYENNE MAN:
I know you knew.
I show you that scar to tell you I come.
But you!
FAGGOT WOMAN [*oblivious to his scorn*]:
And then I hear you singing,
And I know that song, too. . . .
I remember. . . .
CHEYENNE MAN:
Death-song singing . . . you do *not* know!
FAGGOT WOMAN [*tenderly*]:
Love-song singing! I do know!
Under the willows . . . long ago. . . .
O Cheyenne man, my husband!
I am not Blackfoot . . . my heart is not Blackfoot!
Tell me where they are!

Rabbit Boy? Tell me! Little Turtle? Tell me!
CHEYENNE MAN [*with renewed bitterness*]:
You care!
Blackfoot wears Rabbit Boy's hair for fringe!
Little Turtle all day long in the wigwam crying. . . .
That is long ago.
Now my hair will be fringe for Blackfoot. . . .
Cheyenne woman!
FAGGOT WOMAN:
My Rabbit Boy! My Little Turtle! . . .
Husband, do you not see that I have knife!
It is cutting the ropes!
I have waited long, long!
CHEYENNE MAN [*rubbing his muscles as she releases him*]:
Long? You dance that dance! Blackfoot dance!
FAGGOT WOMAN:
Sometimes they remember . . . sometimes watch. . . .
I have been here long with my Blackfoot people,
But sometimes they watch. . . .
I dance so that *they* do not remember!
CHEYENNE MAN:
Give me the knife!
FAGGOT WOMAN [*handing it to him*]:
Yes! Quick! You need it.
Quick! The trail is there! Moon coming!
CHEYENNE MAN [*now rising and strong*]:
Yes, the trail!
But *before*, there is something!
I, too, remember Rabbit Boy!
[*He turns swiftly, cat-like, from the sur-*

prised FAGGOT WOMAN, *where, in the gloom, the sleeper lies. There is a sudden blow, a groan, and* CHEYENNE MAN *returns triumphantly holding aloft a wet scalp. The beam of the moon, rising, reveals it, the hawk's plume dangling.*]

CHEYENNE MAN [*with grim triumph*]:
Now who is the warrior! hu! . . .
Cheyenne man a woman! . . .
To-morrow something will be done! hu!

[FAGGOT WOMAN *sees the scalp, grasps toward it, and draws back with a gasp of horror.*]

CHEYENNE MAN:
You Cheyenne woman!
You help me to take this scalp!
You make vengeance for Rabbit Boy!
They will dance when they see this scalp!
They will dance in the lodges when you come with me!
They will give you a new name—
Kills-with-her-Man, they will say!
They will give you a warrior name—
Kills-with-her-Man!
The trail—come!

[*He secretes the scalp in his waist-band, and turns as if to lead her away.*]

FAGGOT WOMAN [*desperately*]:
Oh, Cheyenne man! Oh, husband!
I loved you every year—never the Blackfoot!
But I cannot go with you!
It is too far—

The trail of two is too wide!
To-morrow they will follow.
You cannot take the woman with you. . . .
Only her love you can take with you. . . .
Only her love . . . only her love. . . .

[*She embraces him passionately*]:

Give me one kiss, Cheyenne man!
One kiss of love, my husband!
And when you are come into the village of our people
Sing for me again the song of remembrance. . . .
My husband!

CHEYENNE MAN [*thoughtful*]:

Yes—the trail *is* too long. . . .
Oh, Cheyenne woman, I will come again!
With many warriors, I will come again!
The trail is too long—
They will follow—
But the knife is sharp!

FAGGOT WOMAN:

Now again—and go!

[*He kisses her, embracing her closely. As he does so, she steals the scalp from his waistband. The hoot of an owl is heard.*]

CHEYENNE MAN:

The owl cries!
It is good medicine! . . .
Kills-with-her-Man! . . .
I go.

[*As the moon rises full he disappears.*]

FAGGOT WOMAN [*watches after him. Then in an agony, she sinks to her knees, pressing the*

scalp with its draggled feather passionately to her lips]:

Young Hawk!
My Blackfoot boy! My Blackfoot boy!

[*The owl is heard hooting.*]

CURTAIN

BROTHER BILL

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BROTHER BILL

by

ALFRED KREYMBORG

CHARACTERS

JENNIE

BENNIE

PLACE: *The sofa of a Harlem parlor.*

[*To avoid a constant repetition of the names of the two characters* BENNIE *speaks in roman type and* JENNIE *in italics.*]

Aren't you *sure* you love me as you used to, Jennie?
I love you all o' that an' a little bit more.
But I'm not so sure that you love me. You used to, Bennie?
Me love you?—*love* you?—*you?* More than ever before.
Then who was that girl I saw you talkin' to?
Who was *what* girl?
The one you were walkin' with.
Me walk with a girl?—a *girl?*
I saw you, Bennie.
Why that was a neighbor o' mine, just a neighbor, Jennie.
Did you have to hold her arm?

Was the street so slippery?
No.
Did she have to lean on you?
Is that what your shoulder's for?
No.
Then was that neighbor o' yours just a neighbor, Ben?
I'd a done the same for her sister or mother, Jen.
You'd a let her sister look like a lovesick calf?
I would.
An' her dear old mother begin to giggle an' laugh?
I would.
Have you many more female friends in that family?
Will you hold your horses and let me explain?
Not to me.
Stop walkin' the carpet, Jen,
an' sit down by me here.
I won't.
In less than a minute
I'll show you there's nothin' in it.
You won't.
Don't you love this old sofa
the way that you used to, dear?
I do—
But don't you dare touch me,
I won't have you touch me,
Ben.
Do you have to sit like a poker,
can't you lean back?
I can.
Do you have to act like the Civil War
or a railroad wreck?
I don't.

Brother Bill

Maybe you want me to grab my hat
an' crawl home again?
No, Ben.
What about a little smile to help a little then?
Thanks, Jen.
Now the way it all happened was just like this—
Will you gimme a kiss?
No.
The way it all started began with another—
Which other?— . .
My brother Bill.
Since when have you had a brother?
You never told that one before.
You mean I've been lyin'?—
I can tell without tryin'—
tell without tryin'—
Don't start cryin', Jen. . . .
I've never mentioned my brother—
my poor brother Bill before—
because he's been sort o' wayward—
an' the family's been sort o' sore.
The family's done everything for 'im—
in hopes that the boy would reform—
but Bill's gone on bein' wayward—
from the time that poor Bill was born.
It sounds like a likely story,
but where has he been all this time?
Was he committed to jail for life
committin' some awful crime?
He's much too timid for that, dear—
an' so slow an' dumb he couldn't.
He's never done one thing right he should—
or one wrong thing he shouldn't.

What kind of a boob can he be then—
what's he got to do with you—
that he should bob up at a time when I
begin to find you're untrue?
I'll be darned if I'll listen to you, Jen—
damned if you'll say that o' me!
Go on an' go off with some other fine men
an' see what such men'll do!
Come back to the sofa, Bennie,
Stop walkin' the carpet so.
Will you listen to me then, Jennie?
Don't grab your hat, don't go.
Don't you want my arm behind you?—
No—
This soft little pillow here?—
No.
Now tell me about your brother—
All right, but I'm goin' slow.
Make it as slow as you wish to—
Make it as fast as you can—
but, Honey—love me as you used to-
or I'll die with lovin' you so!
I love you more than I used to—
Much more than you did before?
I love you *this* much an' love you *that* much—
Is that all?—
An' a little bit more!
Now straighten your tie an' tell me—
smoothen your hair an' say
what this strange little brother o' yours has to do
with the dame that I saw yesterday. . . .
When poor old Bill came home once more—
came back on the Adriatic—

we heard a limping step on the stair—
a doleful knock on the door.
As soon as we saw that he'd lost a leg—
the leg that he'd lost in the war—
Father forgave 'im an' Mother gave 'im
a bunk an' a bed in the attic.
What was he doin' abroad, dear—
did he have to enlist in the war?
He'd fallen in love again—another girl again—
then ran away as before.
What was the matter with her, Ben—
didn't she love 'im at all?
She loved 'im so well that he ran like hell—
that's what he does when *they* fall.
Father was frightfully angry—
Mother was angry too.
"It's the last time the runt'll do that—" said Dad—
an' Mother—"What'll *you* do?"
"When the lad sneaks back I'll strap 'im tight—
strap 'im so he can't move—
cure 'im o' waywardness—drag in the girl—
an' make 'im confess 'is love."
"It's dreadful the way he's bashful—"
sighed Mother an' Dad spied a tear—
"It took you almost as long as him—"
"It runs in the family, dear."
It runs in the family, Bennie?
Is that what's the matter with you?
Me?—
Yes—
No—wait, Jennie—
will you wait'll the story's through?

We never thought when the boy got back—
we'd have to buy 'im a crutch.
Mother wept over 'im, led 'im upstairs—
an' Father 'imself was touched.
But when Dad got over lookin' so sad
he grinned a queer little grin—
an' said to me in 'is funny old way—
"Now here's where the girl comes in!"
The attic Mother gave Brother
was nice an' neat an' trim.
It had just one small window—
just large enough for him
to see what there was of an alley
an' then what there was of a wall—
with just another small window—
four stories tall.
Must you go so slow—
can't you skip the rest—
oh—what happened then?
One moonlight night, Bill looked an' saw—
The girl you were seen with, Ben?
The same little dark-eyed devil—
Did she look so good to you?
I'm simply tellin' what poor Bill saw—
You see he was cross-eyed too.
She lived behind some red flowers—
an' seein' him smile, smiled too.
I thought you said he was bashful?
He's not when they're not too close.
But when it comes to proposin',
he's redder than the reddest rose—
an' leaves the proposin' to somebody else—
He left all o' that to you?

Brother Bill

He'd a done it if he could but he couldn't.
Father decided that.
Why didn't Father do it?
Mother's a jealous cat.
An' now poor Bill was helpless—
crippled in body an' will—
Dad said, "Now is the time, Ben,
for you to step out an' help Bill."
Are you so good at proposin'—
I've never noticed it, Ben.
Wait a moment—
I'll never, never—
Hold your horses, Jen.
When it comes to speakin' for others—
an' the other's my brother too—
You can do it as often as you have a brother
an' that little brother has you!
Come back off the carpet, Jennie!
I'll never come back to you!
You mean to tell me they'll marry?
An' you never asked me to?
Wait'll I tell you—
Never—
Honey—
Never again—
It's because like Bill I've been bashful.
It runs in the family, Jen.
Come on over—
come an' sit down—
come an' sit down on my knee.
Gee, what a wonderful family—
What?—
o' tongue-tied knock-kneed men!

You needn't begin insultin' us—
An' you needn't be askin' me—
I'm askin' you now—
Askin' me what?—
Will you marry—
marry me, Jen?
Do you swear you've got a brother in the attic?
I do.
An' the name your parents gave 'im isn't Ben?
Not yet.
An' you swear it's only Bill an' only her—
I do—
An' him an' only him—
She'll ever get!
I'll forgive you this time—
but don't do it again—
Never, Jen.
An' can you—will you
forgive me?
I couldn't help it, Ben.
Forgive you?—
An' love me?—
As long as I live!
Forever?—
An' ever—
if you'll *marry* me, Jen?
You've said it?—
Twice—
but how about you?
What makes you
ask that o' me, dear?
I've always said it, Ben!

CURTAIN

RAPUNZEL

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RAPUNZEL

by

ALTER BRODY

CHARACTERS

MALKA SOREL, a girl of about fourteen,
RIFKAH SOREL, her mother,
SHOLEM SOREL, her father.

PLACE: *The kitchen of a Harlem flat.*

SCENE: *The room opens on a square yard walled on all sides with tiers of rising and descending windows. Though small and crowded the room is well-kept and everything neatly arranged. Several pots are cooking on the stove. On the table near the stove are two loaves of dough, evidently waiting for their turn in the stove. The wash tub, whose top is covered with oil cloth, seems to serve as an extra table. A doorway leads into the other room to the left. Hall door to the right.*

MRS. SOREL, *a short, rather stout-looking woman of fifty, stands beside the wash tub chopping fish hash in a large wooden bowl.*

MRS. SOREL [*in a tired, petulant tone, punctuated by her chopper*]: Malka! You hear me, Malka!

MALKA [*from the next room, startled*]: I . . . me, ma?

MRS. SOREL: Reading, reading. All the time she sits there smoothing those books they send her. Ai! what a crown for my old age. Malka!

MALKA [*from the other room, in a scared, shrinking voice*]: Ye-es, ma.

MRS. SOREL: Did any one ever hear of such a thing? Only in this crazy country! The blind read with their fingers. Eggs hatched without hens. Horses ride in automobiles. Ai! Sometime I'll fall dead in my traces too, like that horse they picked up this morning. Then maybe I'll be freed from my load.

MALKA [*from the other room, in the same scared, shrinking voice*]: Y-e-s, ma.

MRS. SOREL: If only she wouldn't read so much . . . maybe the Lord would have pity on her, seeing that she is blind and afflicted! But she, ever since they taught her how to read again with her fingers . . . contented and happy as if she lacked nothing . . . back to the books like before, day and night, night and day. [*Pauses a moment, then continues furiously.*] But talk to her! Talk to a brick in the wall! All she knows is that she's blind, and need do nothing. And her mother . . . let her break her twisted hands chopping! Let her grate away her fingers on the washboard, like horse-radishes. *She* must keep her fingers soft and delicate for caressing those books.

MALKA [*feels her way in, guiltily, from the other room*]: I wanted to . . . but you never let me. . . . I . . .

[*Gropes for chopper in her mother's hands.*]

MRS. SOREL [*contemptuously*]: Go to! Go to! my industrious one. I don't need your help. As long as there is some strength left, I'll pull the wagon. Sit down, and I'll give you some soup.

MALKA [*relieved, edging back into the other room*]: But I want to help you, mama . . . but I'm not hungry.

MRS. SOREL: Not hungry! From what do you expect to get strength from? Maybe from those books of yours.

MALKA: I . . . I'm not hungry.

MRS. SOREL: Sit down, sit down—no one is consulting you! [*As* MALKA *hesitates sullenly—with bitterness.*] A heart of flint! . . . That's right . . . punish your mother—punish her—the old nag! [*Changing her voice into a pleading whine.*] Malkale . . . precious mine . . . bird of mine . . . darkened life of mine—as if my own eyes had been extinguished in my head! Have pity on your mother and taste this delicious chicken soup. Maybe it will bring some light into your eyes. As you see me alive—ten blocks I pushed my feet to the chicken-market. God knows I can't afford it even there. A bitter bite for my old age that I, Isaac Eisenstein's daughter, should have to haggle from booth to booth like a fishwife. But nothing is too hard for a mother. I say to myself: maybe she needs some indulgence, some luxury . . . a piece of chicken . . . an orange . . . I would turn my blood into gold, and pour it down her throat—if only it could bring back the light into her eyes. . . . Here, child! [*Pours some soup into plate.*] Just taste it . . . just sniff it. It smells up the whole

room like frankincense. [MALKA *sits down sullenly.*] There, there. And don't make such a wry face. It isn't castor oil. God knows I'm no enemy of yours, child. I scold and curse! But is it I? It's my sorrows crying aloud in me. Each time I think I have more than I can bear, something new finds its way to my back. [*Goes back to her chopping. Half to herself.*] Other people have husbands—helpmates. However bitter one's lot, it's less bitter divided. But I—oh, I have nothing to complain of; my parents fitted me out with a male, gave me a dowry, fixed up a store for me that was the sight of the market place. But the only kind of business your father ever did was exchanging stories with the synagogue do-nothings—about things that neither stood nor flew—as he must be doing this very minute! [*Stops chopping and beats her breast fiercely.*] But whom can *I* tell my story to! No one! . . . like a stone in the desert! If you only knew your mother's lot, child. [*Turns to* MALKA, *gesticulating, chopper in hand.*] Before I could stand on my feet, I was loaded with burdens, and started off. . . . Always the big girl, by my parents, ever since another baby was born! . . . always: it's all right, the big girl can attend to it. Rifkah! —when are you going to fetch a bucket of water from the well? Rifkah!—there's a churchful of peasants in the store—why don't you run over and help your father? Rifkah!—you lazy thing, the cows will cross the Russian border before you get through feeding those chickens! I suppose my parents—peace be upon them!—thought they were going to reward me—with a dowry and a husband.

Little did they know they were putting another pack on my young shoulders. Ai, what a merry dance I've led with your father! First my Sorelle—peace be upon her—falls out of the hanging cradle, and crushes her head against a bedpost. Why? Because I was busy earning our bread at the store—and your father was busy telling stories in the synagogue. Then the cholera came! A twin—such fine boys! Then your father takes a stroll through Count Blitzki's woods, and, being good-natured, lends a helping hand to some peasants who were chopping down his trees. We had to unswaddle ourselves to the skin—store, and everything we had, to pay for it. Then in Columbus's Kingdom,—as if my cup was not full already—after saving my son from Czar Nicholas, there had to arise a Czar for me here. Oh, a gold star they gave me, for you, my son! May their star go out, like mine went out! And what comfort have I got from my other children? One of them married a husband like mine, who can make children, but can't feed them. And if your other sister has lifted herself out of her mother's penury, and, thank God, lacks nothing,—so she is childless all these years. [*Pauses and continues with a sigh.*] I pity my children. But do they pity me? God would not hold it against your sister if she lightened her mother's lot a little, so she doesn't have to share her house with strangers. But she doesn't understand, God forgive her—or doesn't want to understand. [*A knock at the door.*] Aha . . . he is here—your dear father. [*Opens the door to let him in, and steps back, surveying him with hands folded on her bosom—with mock obei-*

sance.] Come in, come in, Reb Sholem. Already through with your work? Weren't there any tales left to tell?

Sholem [*excitedly, ignoring her sarcasm*]: Rifkah, you must come with me there. To-morrow is Sabbath. After dinner we will take Malka, and we will all go there together.

Mrs. Sorel: Have you gone crazy? There?—Where!—What!

Sholem [*ignoring her*]: Such a long time since I have felt some grass under my feet. Every day since we moved uptown, I pass that park on my way to the synagogue, but I'm always afraid to cross the avenue and go in. You have to take your life into your hands. To-day I saw my chance, and ran through the automobiles. How shall I describe it to you!—A garden of Eden! . . . just like the grounds of the Georgofsky Monastery in Biala . . . smooth silky lawns everywhere, like fresh-laid Sabbath table-cloths. Rows and rows of well-trimmed trees, as if they were carved out with a knife.—And would you believe it?—birches! You remember, Rifkah, on the highway as you ride out of Biala, how they used to flash through the trees on both sides, as if the woods were scrawled over with a silver pencil. Ah, fine, fine! A garden of Eden, I tell you. You want to linger there and never come out.

Mrs. Sorel: Ah, Sholem, Sholem! When will you grow older! Upon my word, when I bethink myself, I say to myself: whom are you crying to! what do you want from him! He is fifty years old, but he is still a little boy. He has nothing, and he

needs nothing. If he were allowed to play in the park with the other children, he would be perfectly happy. I know you, Sholem—that's how you were in Russia, and that's how you're here. Have I forgotten the pillow of shame that you slipped under my head at my very first childbirth? Where is Sholem—everybody asked. And where *was* Sholem —in the swamps fishing with the gooseherds. But what's the use of— What's that piece of wood sticking out of your prayer-bag! Were you gathering fire-wood for next winter, in the park? Of you everything is possible.

SHOLEM: That's . . . nothing . . . a piece of willow. You roll it under a flat iron, or something heavy, and the bark separates. Then you make little notches in the hollow bark, and it's a flute . . . for Malka . . . I thought for Malka . . . I would make a flute for her.

MALKA [*lifts up her face eagerly from her soup*]: Papa! . . . for me . . . a willow flute! The gooseherds that you went with . . . do they play on them to their flocks? In the books I read about Pan . . . he's a god. . . .

MRS. SOREL [*furiously*]: Give me that stick! [SHOLEM *hands it to her shamefacedly.* MRS. SOREL *pulls it out of his hand, and flings it out of the window.*] You old, old fool! When will you get some sense into your head? Did you hear what a loving father you have, Malka? He brought you a piece of wood from the park. Maybe if he had gone out and brought some bread for his children like other fathers, you wouldn't be blind now. [*Looks at the clock suddenly.*] Woe is me! Eleven

o'clock, and I stand talking with him. Soon the boarders will be beleaguering the table, and the Sabbath is not half ready. Here, my breadwinner, sit down and keep chopping the fish, while I run down to the butcher. The third time this morning that I drag my swollen legs up and down the stairs, while you promenade through the park.

[*Pushes chopper into his hands, puts on a shawl, and hurries out.* SHOLEM *chops with clumsy deliberation.*]

MALKA [*lifting her face cautiously from her soup*]: Papa, can you tell stories?

SHOLEM: Stories, child!

MALKA: Mama says in the synagogue after service they gather round you, and you do nothing but tell stories all day—about things that neither stood nor flew. I wish I were a boy and could go there. It must be wonderful sitting there and listening to stories all day. Everything must be so brown and quiet in the synagogue—a warm, brown quiet—soft and smelling with a dreamy mustiness, like the big velvet bag of your prayer-shawl. You know, papa, when you leave it sometimes, I unbutton the bag and bury my face in the folds of the prayer shawl, and inhale it like a flower . . . because it makes me dream that I'm in the synagogue with you . . . instead of . . . [*Shivers as if with cold.*] Papa, won't you tell *me* a story sometime . . . now . . . about things that neither stood nor flew! Papa, yes! —mama won't know.

SHOLEM: Stories about things that neither stood nor flew!—you mustn't believe everything your mother says. Do you think one goes to the synagogue to

tell stories? It's true you meet people there, and you're human like they, so you speak to them. Is it a sin to exchange a few words with a fellow-Jew?

MALKA [*disappointedly*]: So you don't tell any stories in the synagogue . . . I . . . I thought . . . I'll tell you what, papa, I'll tell you a story . . . out of my book,—and you listen.

[*Runs into the other room.*]

SHOLEM [*calling after her*]: Don't bother me, child. I have no time for stories.

MALKA [*comes back with a huge Braille book, and turns pages quickly*]: Oh, here is a story that you'll like. It's called *The Fisherman and His Wife.* Just like you and mama. You were a fisherman in Russia, weren't you?

SHOLEM [*scornfully*]: Fisherman! Who put such notions into your head! We had a store in the market place, where you could buy everything from a scythe to a pair of sandals. But read, read . . . let me see how you read with your fingers . . . let me see! Your great-grandfather Jacob—peace be upon him!—became blind like you. But, you know, he never skipped his three pages of Talmud a day. I remember when I was a little boy, I used to lead him to his pew in the synagogue, and open the Talmud for him. "Sholem, my child," he used to say, "how far did we ride yesterday?" "To the middle of Chapter Sabbatical Year," I would answer. Then he would read aloud page after page, and tell me when to turn the leaf over at the end of each page. But then he knew it by heart.

MALKA: I know this story by heart. I read it over again and again, because it makes me think of you

and mama. But I don't know . . . because mama isn't greedy like the fisherman's wife in the story. If you caught a fish that was an enchanted prince she would never think of asking him for castles or palaces and treasures. But I think she would scold you for not bringing it home, so she could chop it up for Friday night. Wouldn't it be horrible if she did that—if it was an enchanted prince! But you didn't hear the story. [*Reads.*] "In a poor little hut down by the sea there once lived a fisherman and his wife." [*Stops short suddenly.*] Papa, in Russia, did we live in a little hut by the sea?

SHOLEM [*meditatively*]: Oh, there must be sea in Russia, because they used to say the Czar rules over five seas. But we lived on Gentile Lane, between the highway and the market place. How should you remember—you were an infant then. It wasn't a street like in America—only a wagon-rut between two rows of peasant huts—but I wouldn't exchange it for all their proud paved streets. You walk through them and it's like walking through a prison yard. Everything is walled in and barred. The very earth is bound in stone, as if it were a convict. On my oath, I get dizzy sometimes—to walk, and not feel the earth under your feet. There everything is different. Everything is just right. The brown straw roofs grow into the sky, with the green trees—all of one piece—not like something stuck between heaven and earth like a bone in your throat. Here, if you want to see some trees and a piece of real naked earth, you have to go to the park, where they keep it fenced in with the other animals, as if

it were a wild bear that's liable to escape. Ha, ha! You don't have to go to a park there, I tell you.

MALKA [*with an eager laugh*]: And you don't have to keep off the grass, do you, papa? And do they give you peanuts free, too?

SHOLEM: Peanuts! That's foolishness! But for a penny you can get enough sunflower seeds to crack all day.

MALKA: And you used to fill your pockets with sunflower seeds and go to the woods, didn't you, papa? But wasn't it dreadfully cold?

SHOLEM: Cold! What do they know of cold, here? A ripe Russian frost—you go out in the morning, and your eyes just glow in your head, like hot potatoes in your mouth.

MALKA: Like hot potatoes in your mouth!—that's funny—that's just like Jack Frost in the books . . . he's full of tricks! And it's all white in winter, isn't it?

SHOLEM: All white in winter, and all green in summer . . . that's Russia for you. We don't hide our winters and summers in the park, so people wouldn't notice them.

MALKA: Ooooh! But suppose it rained. Didn't it go through the roof,—if it was made of straw?

SHOLEM: Not through our roof! Only the peasant huts were made that way. But if you ask me, they were a thousand times nicer. Ah, Malkale, if you could only behold Gentile Lane at twilight, with the little low huts on either side, hunched under their great, peaked roofs . . . with ragged gable-ends, sloping way over their tiny windows . . . you know, . . . just like a lot of brown-shawled old beggar-

women drowsing between the trees, with their heads on their laps.

MALKA [*breathlessly*]: Yes . . . and they sit that way. . . . Oh, ever so quietly under the trees, all night . . . but in the morning when the sun shines on their roofs, they throw off their shawls, and turn into a lot of golden-haired little girls playing on the ground.

SHOLEM: Oh, in the morning . . . where does one get such mornings again! Each time you got up it felt as if it was the Feast of Rejoicings. You wanted to pick up the whole world in your arms, and run around with it, like they dance around the pulpit with the Scroll of the Law on the Feast of Rejoicings.—It was another world altogether—another earth and another sky. Here the sky seems to hang right over your nose—there's nothing to lift one's eyes to—all you have to do is to get on top of one of those buildings and stretch out your hand, and you touch it. No wonder it's such a godless country—how can God dwell in such a heaven? There, when you looked up, you felt as if you were a little creature at the bottom of a great, blue sea . . . not stranded on the top of a barren, stony mountain. The earth was so wide, and low, and pleasant . . . a green pasture as it is written in the Book, . . . and the sky was so far up—but one felt nearer God that way. One breathed fresh air—God's own breath—which makes you healthy and humble—not the breath of your next-door neighbor, which inflates you with vanity. One didn't rush. One didn't worry. I used to say to your mother: why should one try to swallow the whole world? A peasant went away

to another store for his latchets?—the Lord will send us another. There are plenty of heathens in the world. But your mother . . .

MALKA [*startled—as if to herself*]: Don't let's talk about mother . . . everything got dark again . . . everything hid itself again . . .

SHOLEM: Child, child! Such a face you have on you—you scare me, as-I-am-a-Jew—like when I found you climbing down the fire-escape in your sleep.

MALKA [*with a strange stare in her eyes*]: I could almost see it . . . before . . . while you were talking to me . . . only quivering as through smoke . . . a green, endless field, with a million little brown roofs scattered in the grass like toadstools, and high over head, a sky full of overloaded white clouds, like ships carrying snow for the winter. That's how Russia looked like—I know! Then something whispered in my ear, look, look . . . but another voice, like a soft hand caressing my eyelids . . . kept warning me: it's dark, it's dark. Only I wanted so much to look . . . I wanted to see your face while you were talking to me . . . with my eyes . . . and suddenly, as if I had pushed a hand away from my eyes, your face swam up and quivered a moment in the smoke. I saw it with my eyes, papa—not in my mind, as when I touch it. Then I heard you say "your mother," and your face turned into a little mouse and jumped right into my eyes, and . . . everything grew dark again. Oh, I'm so afraid, papa . . . I'm so afraid . . . something terrible is going to happen . . . I shouldn't have looked! I shouldn't have looked!

SHOLEM [*takes her head in his arms, stroking it soothingly*]: Nothing but good shall befall. It's the finger of God, my child. In His own name He shall put forth His mighty hand, and liberate you out of darkness, as He liberated Israel out of Egypt.
MALKA [*excitedly*]: No, no! I know, papa—it's the voices again . . . they talk to me, and I have to obey them. . . . Oh, I shouldn't have looked! I shouldn't have looked!
SHOLEM: Voices! What has possessed you, my child? What are you dreaming about!
MALKA [*in a trance, half to herself*]: Oh, I don't know, papa. Only when I became blind . . . I remember I was lying on the sofa in the parlor, over a book of fairy tales, when suddenly I heard a singing-like in the yard: "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair." Just like a story I had read. . . . Only somehow I knew it meant me. . . . I knew I was being called to the window. . . . I couldn't hold back any longer, and, as if something was telling me what to do, I leaned out of the window, and let my hair down over my eyes. I leaned far out, until I grew dizzy, and felt myself falling into the yard . . . but the voice sang "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, close your eyes." I closed my eyes, and a voice, like a soft hand caressing my eyelids, whispered into my ears: "It's dark, it's dark." It felt like playing a game with yourself, only it was so solemn and thrilling. "Can I have three wishes?" I asked. "You can have anything you wish, if you keep your eyes closed." From the kitchen I could hear mother scrubbing on the washboard. But it sounded like a tune:

"You'll never see your mother any more,
You'll never see your mother any more."

"Can I never see any one any more?" "No one can come into your tower, unless he climbs up on your hair," answered the voice. Then . . . oh, then . . . papa . . . I promised . . .

SHOLEM: What did you promise? Whom did you promise? It's an evil dream, child, an evil dream.

MALKA: I promised,—and suddenly the voice sang, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, open your eyes." Then I realized something must have happened to me, and it was now all over. I opened my eyes fearfully, afraid of what I might see in front of me. But I couldn't see anything. "It's dark, it's dark," I cried. But a voice echoed me softly: "It's dark, it's dark." "Mother, mother," I cried, "I can't see." But the echo answered: "Mother, mother, I will never see you any more." I heard mother calling me. But a voice answered in me: "No one can come into my tower, unless he climbs up on my hair." Then mother came in: "Malka, Malka, what's the matter?" But I didn't want to tell. I hid my face from her. But she pulled my hands away, and looked at me, and began to scream: "An evil eye has been cast on my child." And all the neighbors rushed in . . . but I knew . . . I knew what had happened with me!

SHOLEM [*wringing his hands*]: Woe is me! Woe is me! What she has done to herself! It's an evil spirit that you admitted into you, Malka, and he locked himself up in your eyes. What is there to be done? . . . where can one get your mother now?

. . . I'll call the rabbi . . . when one needs her, she's not here . . . oh . . . oh . . . oh . . .

MALKA [*cowering, and putting her hands over her eyes*]: No, papa, dear, don't tell mother . . . don't call any one.

SHOLEM: Woe is me! Woe is me! The devil has entered her, and she is shielding him with her own hands. You don't know what you're doing, child. [*Pulls her hands away from her face; she shuts her eyes tightly.*] Where does one get your mother? [*Runs suddenly into the other room and comes back with a Hebrew Bible.*] Open your eyes and let them gaze at some Holy Script. Open your eyes, and maybe he'll fly out of them.

MALKA [*in panic*]: No, no! . . . not yet . . . I don't want to. . . . [*Soothingly, as if to somebody else.*] It's dark! . . . it's dark. . . . [*Pauses and listens expectantly, then in a thrilling, singing voice —her face listening to herself as to a voice from afar.*] Rapunzel, Rapunzel, close your eyes. . . . [*Lifting up her face triumphantly, with her eyes tightly closed.*] No one can come into my tower . . . [*with a cryptic smile lighting up her face*] unless he climbs up on my hair. . . .

SHOLEM: Open your eyes, open your eyes . . . it's an evil spirit that's talking in you . . . open your eyes, my Malkale. . . .

MALKA [*a sudden thought comes into her face. She opens her eyes slowly and looks up to her father with a wild eagerness*]: Papa! Let's run away—you and I—let's run away to Russia . . . where it's all white in winter and all green in summer. [*Door opens and* MRS. SOREL *enters, loaded with bags.* MALKA

turns her head and catches sight of her. Terrifiedly.] Mama! [*Runs to her father and digs her face into him.*] I don't want to . . . I don't want to . . . it's dark, it's dark. . . . [*Lifts her head and digs it again into her father's lap—breathlessly.*] I see . . . don't want to . . . I don't want to. . . . [*Despairingly.*] Oh, I see . . . I see . . . I see. . . .

Mrs. Sorel: What has happened here! What has befallen the child!

Sholem [*excitedly*]: A miracle, Rifkah, a miracle . . . it was an evil spirit . . . the Lord has opened her eyes!

Mrs. Sorel: Do my ears hear? . . . Malkale! . . . Malkale! . . . [*Runs over to her and pulls her hands away from her face.*] Look at me! . . . look at me! Do you see your mother?

Malka [*shrinking from her in terror*]: I see . . . I see. . . .

Mrs. Sorel [*drags her to the door, opens it, and screams hysterically into the hall*]: Neighbors, good people, fellow-Jews . . . come here . . . come here! . . . See—she sees! . . . a miracle . . . see . . . God has reminded himself of me this day. . . . [*Flings her arms out ecstatically, sinks slowly to her knees at* Malka's *feet—her face uplifted, her eyes half-closed in devout rapture.*] Rejoice with me . . . come to my festival, my friends. . . . It's light again in my child's eyes!

[*Neighbors throng around—*Sholem, *Bible in hand, stands by awkwardly, crowded aside by the fierceness of her outburst.*]

Neighbors: As-I-live, she sees! A holy miracle.

. . . The Lord has had mercy. . . . Look at her. . . . There is a God yet in heaven. . . .

MALKA [*wailingly*]: I see . . . I see . . . I see. . . .

CURTAIN

THE NO 'COUNT BOY

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THE NO 'COUNT BOY

by

PAUL GREEN

CHARACTERS

PHEELIE
ENOS, her beau
THE NO 'COUNT BOY
AN OLD NEGRO WOMAN

TIME: *Several years ago.*
PLACE: *Before a farmhouse in eastern North Carolina.*

The scene is the small yard immediately before a Negro cabin. At the right front is a thick lilac bush with a bench beside it, and to the left from this a clumpy china tree with a rocking-chair under it. At the left rear is a well, roughly boarded up, a chain and battered tin bucket hanging from a cross-piece above. In the back is the cabin. Rickety steps lead up to the door in the center. It is an afternoon late in summer.

PHEELIE, *a neat Negro girl of seventeen, is sitting on the bench by the lilac tree looking through a book. She is dressed in cheap*

clothes—a white dress, white shoes and stockings.

Presently there is the sound of an approaching buggy in the lane off at the left and a voice calls, "Whoa!" PHEELIE *listens a moment, and then, without turning her head, gives it a toss and goes on fingering the leaves of her book.* ENOS *comes in at the left and stands watching her. He is a short stocky Negro of twenty or more, dressed in a faded gray suit and black felt hat. His celluloid collar and scarlet tie shine out brilliantly against the black of his face.*

ENOS [*in a drawling voice that now and then drops into a stammer*]: Well, Pheelie, heah I is.

PHEELIE [*looking up casually*]: I see you is, and you's 'bout a hour early.

ENOS: But ain't you all dressed up to go?

PHEELIE: I's dressed up, but I ain't ready to go.

ENOS [*dubiously*]: Well, suh, now—I—I—

PHEELIE: I des' put on dese heah clothes 'caze it was so hot in de house wid my work duds on. [*He takes off his hat and discloses his naturally kinky hair combed back in a straight pompadour. He waits for her to notice it, but she keeps looking straight before her.*] Set down and rest yo'se'f.

[*Somewhat ill at ease he sits down in the rocking-chair and watches her.*]

ENOS: I drapped by a little early hoping—a—mebbe you'd lak to take a small drive befo' church begun.

PHEELIE [*in the same cold voice*]: Thanky, I don't believe I wants to take no drive.

[*She becomes absorbed in her book.*]

ENOS [*picking at the lining of his hat*]: And I thought we mought stop by Buie's Creek and get some ice cream.

[*He watches her narrowly.*]

PHEELIE [*after a moment*]: Dat'd be nice, I reckon, but I don't want no ice cream nuther. [*She is silent again. He pulls nervously at his fingers, making the joints pop.*] And I'd be much obliged if you'd quit popping yo' finger j'ints.

ENOS [*jerking his hands apart and running his fingers over his greased hair*]: 'Scuse me, Pheelie. [*Somewhat timidly, but with a hidden touch of spirit.*] You—you don't seem glad to see me much.

PHEELIE: You didn't have no date to come over heah a hour befo' time.

ENOS [*worried*]: I knows it. But whut's de matter wid you? You ain't mad at me, is you?

PHEELIE: No, I ain't mad.

ENOS: Seems lak you'd druther look at dat old book dan talk to me.

PHEELIE: Mebbe I had.

[*He feels his tie, twirls his hat, and spits softly through his teeth off to one side.*]

ENOS: Whut sorter book is it, Pheelie?

PHEELIE: What difference do it make to you? You ain't int'rested in no book.

ENOS: 'Speck dat's right. But you sho' seems mo tuk wid it dan anything I ever seed you have befo'.

PHEELIE: It's a fine pitchture book.

ENOS: Whah'd you get it?

PHEELIE: Dis mawning I was up to Mis' Ella's helping her hoe out de gyarden, and she told me a whole heap 'bout de places she and Mr. Jack went when dey was merried. And she give me dis book dat showed a passel of things.

ENOS: Hunh, dey had money to travel wid and enjoy deirselves.

PHEELIE: She said one place dey went to was some sorter Falls or something lak dat, whah de water poured over in a great river and made a racket same as de world was busting up.

ENOS: Dat ain't nothing—mostly talk, I bet a dollar.

PHEELIE [*closing the book with a bang*]: Dat's whut you allus says. You don't care a straw 'bout gwine off and seeing things.

ENOS [*sharply*]: Ain't I done told you, honey bunch, we ain't gwine have no money to be traipsing round de world, not yit nohow.

PHEELIE: Don't you honey me no mo', I tells you.

ENOS [*amazed*]: What'n de name of Old Scratch ails you? Ain't I gut a right to honey you? and you engaged to me!

PHEELIE: Engaged to you! It's you engaged to me.

ENOS: Aw right, I's engaged to you den, and you knows mighty drot'n well I's glad to be too. Dey ain't no put-on wid me.

PHEELIE: I reckon you is glad. But mess wid me and you won't be engaged to nothing.

ENOS [*pleadingly*]: Now, Pheelie, you better th'ow dat book in de far and come on and le's go foh a drive, it's stirred you all up. Come on, I's gut a mess of news to tell you.

PHEELIE: I ain't gwine on no drive. And I's 'bout

decided not to go wid you to no meeting to-night nuther.

ENOS [*alarmed*]: Lawd, don't talk lak dat. Heah I's been watitng all de week foh dis Saddy night, and you ain't gwine back on me, is you?

PHEELIE [*softening*]: But, Enos, you's so samey, allus satisfied wid whut you has. You des' gits my goat.

ENOS [*humbly*]: If you means I ain't tuk wid no wild ideas or sich 'bout trips way off yonder to see folks making fools of deirselves, den I is samey. But you listen heah, chile, dey ain't no meracles and sich off dere lak what you thinks. Onct I spent a good five dollars gwine on a 'scursion to Wilmington, and dey wa'nt a thing to see, not ha'f as much as dey is on dis heah farm.

PHEELIE: You gut to have eyes to see things. Some folks is natchly bawn blind.

ENOS [*placatingly*]: Well, mebbe when we's merried we'll take a little trip to Raleigh or Durham and see de street cyars and big buildings.

PHEELIE: But I wants to go furder, clean to de mountains, and right on den mebbe.

ENOS: 'Y craps, must think I gut a can of money buried somewhah.

PHEELIE: I don't nuther. Us could hobo, or walk part de way, des' fool along.

ENOS [*laughing*]: Hobo! Us'd hobo right into some white man's jail, dat's whut. And dey ain't nothing to dat walking business. We'd be a purty sight wid our feet blistered and somebody's bulldog tearing plugs out'n—well, you knows whut.

PHEELIE [*ignoring his reply*]: Setting dere looking

through dat book I gut plumb sick and tar'd of you and all dis farming and sweating and gitting nowhah —sick of everything. And des' looking at old lazy Lawrence dancing over the fields made me want to puke.

ENOS [*eyeing her*]: Honey chile, de last time I was heah you said you'd lak it working in de fields wid me and keeping house and sich.

PHEELIE: I will, Enos, I reckons I will. But dat dere book set me to wanting to go off and git away.

ENOS [*moving his chair over to her*]: Listen to me. I knows I ain't fitten to breave on you, but I's gwine do my best by you. And whut you reckon? Mr. Pearson done told me to-day dat he's having de lumber sawed to build our house. September she'll be done, den you'n me kin have business—kin see de preacher.

PHEELIE: Mr. Pearson's good to you awright.

ENOS: Ain't he! Dat's a man whut is a man. And it ain't all foh me he's building dat house. He laks you and says he'll be glad to have you on his place.

PHEELIE [*with signs of interest*]: Whut kind of house is it—des' a shack wid a stick-and-dirt chimley?

ENOS [*jubilantly*]: Now I was des' a-hoping you'd ax dat. No, suh, it ain't no cow-shed you could th'ow a dog through de cracks—nunh—unh. It's gwine be a nice frame house wid a wide po'ch, and it'll be ceiled. And listen heah, it's gwine have wallpaper. And, honey, Mr. Pearson said he wanted you to come up a-Monday and help choose de pattern.

[*He looks at her delightedly.*]

PHEELIE [*her face brightening somewhat*]: Oh, dat's so nice of you and him!

[*She bows her head.*]

ENOS: Whut's de matter now?

PHEELIE [*looking up with tears in her eyes*]: You's too good to me, Enos, and I hadn't ort to allus be so onsatisfied.

ENOS: Sho', never mind now.

[*He puts his arm around her.*]

PHEELIE [*letting her hand rest on his hair*]: Grannys alive! you done spent money to git yo' hair straightened.

ENOS [*with a kind of shamed joy*]: Yeh, yeh, I has. But it was to celebrate a little.

PHEELIE: Dat's th'owing away a dollar and a half. In a little bit it'll be kinky ag'in.

ENOS: Course it will, but I thought you'd lak it while it lasts.

PHEELIE [*laughing*]: You sho' is a proud nigger. [*She kisses him quickly and stands away from him.*] Nunh—unh, I ain't gwine do it no mo'.

[*He drops reluctantly back into his seat, and she sits again on the bench.*]

ENOS [*after a moment*]: You want to take dat little drive now?

PHEELIE: I mought, I guess.

ENOS [*slapping himself*]: Hot dog, den le's go, honey!

PHEELIE [*brightly*]: Lemme shet up de house and we'll be ready. Muh and Pap and all de kids is over to de ice cream supper at Uncle Haywood's befo' preaching.

[*She starts up.*]

ENOS [*standing up*]: Aw right, honey babe. I sho' laks to see you jollied up. And I's got anudder surprise foh you too.

PHEELIE [*stopping*]: You has?

ENOS [*mysteriously*]: Unh—hunh. But I'll tell you a little later.

PHEELIE: Naw, suh, tell me now—please.

ENOS [*anxious to tell it*]: In course I cain't stand out ag'in you. Well, we ain't gwine drive behime no flop-yured mule dis time.

PHEELIE: We ain't!

[*She starts toward the left to look out.*]

ENOS: Naw, suh, I's drivin' Egyp' to-day.

PHEELIE: Mr. Pearson's fine hoss!

ENOS [*grinning*]: Yeh, yeh, sho' is. I worked hard all de week, and dis mawning he come to me and axed me if I didn't want Egyp' to haul you wid to-night.

PHEELIE [*looking off*]: Dere he is. Ain't dat fine, and is he safe?

ENOS: Safe! Safe as a cellar. But, Lawd, he kin burn de wind!

PHEELIE: Goody-good. Now come help me shet de house.

ENOS [*as they go off at the left rear*]: Mr. Pearson knows I ain't gwine beat his stock and bellows 'em lak some de niggers. I tells you, sugar lump, if we stays wid him and do right, some dese days we gwine have money to take dem dere trips you wants to.

[*They have hardly disappeared when a slender Negro youth of sixteen or seventeen, barefooted and raggedly dressed in an old*

pair of overalls, shirt and torn straw hat, comes in at the right front and stands staring after them. He is whittling a green walking-stick. In a moment he pulls out a small mouth organ and begins playing a whirling jig.]

ENOS [*coming back around the corner*]: Who's dat playing to beat de band?

[*He and* PHEELIE *come back into the yard.* PHEELIE *stares at the boy in delighted astonishment. Suddenly he winds upon a high note. As he beats the saliva out of the harp against his thigh, he bursts into a loud joyous laugh.*]

PHEELIE: Lawd, you kin play. Who is you?

ENOS [*with a touch of authority in his voice*]: What you want heah? I ain't never seed you befo'.

BOY [*in a clear childish voice, as he looks at* PHEELIE]: You ain't?

ENOS: Naw, I ain't. Whut you mean walking up in people's yards and acting lak you was home?

BOY: I thought I mought get me a drink from de well dere.

PHEELIE: Help yo'se'f.

[*He draws water and drinks.* ENOS *and* PHEELIE *watch him.*]

ENOS [*in a low voice*]: I bet he's some boy run away from home. Mebbe a tramp, I dunno.

PHEELIE: Dat boy a tramp! Hunh, he ain't no sich.

ENOS: I bet you on it. Looks s'picious to me.

BOY [*returning from the well and wiping his mouth with his sleeve*]: I thought I mought git a bite to eat heah mebbe.

[*He looks from one to the other, a lurking smile in his eyes.*]

PHEELIE [*uncertainly*]: You mought.

ENOS: Lak as not de lady wants to know whah you come from and whut yo' business is befo' she 'gins to feed you.

BOY [*looking at Pheelie*]: Would you?

PHEELIE: Yeh. Whut's yo' name?

BOY [*laughing and blowing out a whiff of music*]: Mostly I ain't gut no name. [*Beating the harp in his hand and scratching his leg with his toe.*] 'Way, 'way back down dere—[*pointing indefinitely behind him*]—whah I come from some of 'em calls me Pete, but mostly dey calls me de No 'Count Boy.

ENOS: Why dey call you dat fo'?

BOY [*laughing again*]: 'Caze I don't lak to work in de fields.

ENOS: Unh—hunh, unh—hunh, I s'picioned it.

BOY: S'picioned whut?

ENOS: Aw, nothing. Anyhow dat's a good name foh you, I bet. Whose boy is you and whah'd you come from 'way back down dere as you calls it?

BOY [*quickly*]: Cuts no wool whose boy I is. As foh whah I come from, I cain't tell you, bo, 'caze I dunno hardly. [*Hesitating and pointing off to the right.*] You see whah de sky come down to de earf —'way, 'way yonder?

ENOS: I sees it.

BOY [*grinning to himself*]: Well, I come from miles and miles beyont it. [*A kind of awe creeping into his words.*] Lawd, Lawd, how fuh has I come?

PHEELIE: You been all dat distance by yo'se'f?

Boy: Sho' has. And whut's mo' I walked it every jump.

[*Again he draws the harp across his lips in a breath of music, all the while watching them with bright eyes.*]

Enos: Whah you gwine?

Boy: Des' gwine.

Pheelie: You mean you ain't gut no special place in mind—you des' hoboing along?

Boy: Dat's it, I reckon.

Enos: How does you git yo' rations—beg foh it?

Boy: I pays foh it when I kin get 'em. Times I goes hongry.

Enos [*looking at him keenly*]: You ain't gut no money, has you?

Boy [*cunningly*]: Dat's awright. I pays foh it des' de same. [*He stops and looks at Pheelie with big eyes.*] You's purty as a pink, ain't you?

Pheelie [*turning away her head*]: Why you ax dat?

Enos [*sharply*]: You needn't be thinking you gwine git yo' supper on soft talk, hoss-cake.

Boy [*still looking at Pheelie*]: Whut's yo' name?

Pheelie: My name's Ophelia, but dey calls me Pheelie.

Boy [*staring at her admiringly and cracking his palm against his thigh*]: Dawg-gone! des' lak me foh de world. I's named one thing and dey calls me anudder.

Enos [*with a hint of uneasiness*]: Heah, I 'specks you better be gwine on up de road. Me'n Miss Pheelie's des' ready to go out foh our afternoon

drive, and we don't want to be bothered wid nobody's no 'count boy.

BOY [*his face falling*]: I hates to hinder you, Miss Pheelie, and cain't I git nothing t'eat—a 'tater or anything?

PHEELIE: I 'speck I could give you a snack in yo' hand right quick.

BOY: No sooner said'n done, I hopes. And I pays you foh it too.

ENOS [*almost sarcastically*]: Gut yo' pockets full of silver and gold, apt as not.

BOY: Naw, suh, I gut something better 'n new money. Heah she is. [*Holding up his harp.*] I plays you a piece or two pieces or three, and you gives me a bite and whut you pleases. [*In mock seriousness he pulls off his hat and addresses them.*] Ladies and ge'men, de fust piece I renders is called "De Dark-eyed 'Oman." It's music 'bout a 'oman whut had three little boys, and dey tuk sick and died one June night whilst de mockingbirds was singing. And allus adder dat dey said she had a dark shadow in her dark eyes.

[*He clears his throat, spits once or twice and lays the harp gently to his lips. Closing his eyes, he begins to play.* ENOS *stirs about him as the notes flood from the boy's mouth, and now and then he looks questioningly at* PHEELIE'S *averted face. The* BOY'S *nostrils quiver, and he makes a sobbing sound in his throat. Tears begin to pour down his cheeks. After a moment he winds up with a flourish.*]

ENOS [*gruffly*]: Lawd Jesus, dat rascal kin blow!

Boy [*looking at* Pheelie *as he wipes his eyes*]: I hope you don't mind. Every time I blows dat piece I cries.

[Pheelie *glances up with moist eyes.*]

Pheelie: I sho' don't mind. Whah you learn dat?

Boy: It's a made piece.

Enos: Who made it?

Boy: Me.

Enos [*ironically*]: Hunh, you mought!

Boy [*his face troubled*]: You believes I made it, don't you, Miss Pheelie?

Pheelie: Dat I do.

Boy [*his face clearing*]: Aw right den. And I'll play you anudder piece foh dat snack of grub.

Pheelie: Dat one's enough to pay.

Enos: You sho' you didn't git no rations down de road?

Boy: Not nary a chaw.

Pheelie: Ain't you had nothing all day?

Boy: Nothing but some branch water and a little bitsy bird I killed wid a rock and fried.

[*His face takes on a sober look, and tears again glisten in his eyes.*]

Enos [*looking at him in astonishment*]: Yo sho' is a quare fellow.

Boy [*staring up at the sky*]: Dat little bird was singing so sweet and ruffling his breast in de wind, and I picked up a rock and des' th'owed devilish lak, never thought I'd hit him. But dat's de way it is—when you thinks you won't, you does, and I kilt him.

Pheelie: And den you et him?

Boy [*wiping his eyes on his sleeves*]: I was so hon-

gry den, and I built a speck of fire and baked him. [*Wretchedly.*] Wan't it better foh me to eat him dan foh maggits to git at him?

PHEELIE: 'Twas dat.

BOY [*mournfully*]: But I sho' felt bad 'bout dat little bird. I cain't git his chune out'n my haid. He sot on dat limb and would give a long call and den a short one—[*imitating on his harmonica*]—des lak dat.

ENOS: You's a mighty big fellow to be crying over a bird, seems lak to me.

PHEELIE: Enos, you quit dat making fun.

BOY: When I come through de creek back dere, a good-god was pecking in a high daid tree, and he turnt his haid sideways and hickered at me. I heahd him say he gwine ha'nt me foh killing dat bird.

ENOS: I swear!

[PHEELIE *gives him a cutting look, and he stops his laughing.*]

BOY: I've hearn dat dem good-gods is old women turnt to birds 'caze dey was weeked. And you see dey's still gut on little old red caps.

PHEELIE: Dey won't hurt you.

ENOS: Pshaw, dey ain't nothing but great big sap-suckers.

BOY: How you know? Des' de same dis'n scolded me foh th'owing dat rock. I could tell it in his talk and de way he looked at me.

PHEELIE: You didn't mean to do it nohow, and you was hongry too. Now play us some mo'.

BOY: I 'speck mebbe den it's aw right, I 'speck so.

Now I plays you my udder piece to pay you plenty foh my eatings.

PHEELIE: 'Tain't dat, 'tain't dat. We laks to heah you. I'll feed you foh nothing.

BOY: Well, listen to dis, folkses, dis moan song. [*He again pulls off his hat and makes his stage bow.*] Ladies and ge'men, dis is a talking piece I's gwine render. It's 'titled "De Coffin Song," and tells 'bout a nice gal whut went away from home all dressed out in white and died, and dey sont her body back to her Muh and Pap. Dis heah's de Coast-Line coming down de track on a dark and rainy night wid her coffin on boa'd. [*He closes his eyes and begins blowing the choo-kerr-choo of a starting train. He intersperses his blowing with short speeches.*] De rain is beating on de window-panes and everybody is mo'nful. [*The choo-kerr-chooing takes on a sobbing note, and the speed of the train increases.*] De old man and de 'oman is at de station waiting foh deir daughter's body, her dey loved so well, oh, her dey loved so well. "Don't cry, honey, she gone to heaven," de old man say, Lawd, Lawd, de old man say. Den he heah dat coffin-blow. [*A long mournful wail of the engine's whistle follows, swallowed up in the growing speed of the locomotive. He opens his eyes and begins to chant forth his bits of dialogue.*] Now she's balling de jack 'cross de river trustle. [*He quivers and sings with the straining timbers of the bridge.*] Heah she is passing by de gravel-pit. How she goes by, how she goes by! Lak a great black hoss, a great black hoss! And now she's blowing foh de crossing. [*The whistle moans again.*] Her Muh and Pap's

on de flatform at de station and dey feel deir hearts in deir moufs at de crying of dat train, Lawd, Lawd, de crying of dat train! [*Again he gives the coffin-blow, long and heart-breaking.*] De train she slow up. [*The choo-kerr-chooing slowly stops.*] Dey takes out de coffin and flowers and puts her in a huss, and dey all drives off slow, slow, lak dis. [*He plays a sort of dead march and stalks back and forth across the yard.*] Den de next day dey takes her to de graveyard, de lonesome graveyard. And de preacher preach—shout hallelujah—de preacher preach and de people sing, shouting glory to de lamb. And den dey 'gin th'ow dirt in on her. [*He imitates the thump, thump of clods falling on the coffin.*] Den de favver and muvver and sisters and bruvvers all cry out loud. Her Pap cries lak dis. [*He gives forth a long deep groan.*] And de sisters and bruvvers lak dis. [*A medley of weeping sounds.*] And de muvver cry lak dis. [*A high piercing shriek.*] And den dey roach up de grave and de preacher make prayer—"Lawd, Lawd Jesus, have mercy upon us!" Den dey all go off and dey ain't nothing left 'cepting a crow in a high scraggly pine a-saying: [*He mingles his music with a raucous h-a-r-r-c-k, h-a-r-r-c-k.*] Den adder dat when night come, dark and rainy night, de last thing is a small wind in de bushes lak dis:

[*A trembling flute-like note rises, bubbles and disappears. He beats the harp against his hand and looks uncertainly at* Enos *and* Pheelie, *the tears wetting his cheeks.*]

Enos [*presently*]: I cain't deny you gut de world

beat handling dat baby, but whut'n de name o' God makes you cry so much?

Boy [*watching* Pheelie's *bowed head*]: When I plays dat piece I feel so lonesome lak I cain't help crying, I allus cries.

Enos: I's seed folks cry when deir people died, but, Lawd, I never seed no sich cry-baby as you.

Boy: You's hard-hearted. Look at Miss Pheelie, she's crying.

Enos: Help my life! Whut ails you, Pheelie?

Pheelie [*hurriedly drying her eyes*]: Don't make no fun of me, Enos. I des' had de blues ag'in.

Enos [*patting his hat anxiously*]: Heah, don't you git feeling dat a-way no mo', honey. Le's go on wid our drive.

Boy: You calls her honey!

Enos: Dat I do. She's my gal, dat's whut. And listen to me—I don't want no no 'count fellow come piddling by wid a harp and wild talk to git her upsot.

Boy [*unhappily*]: I didn't know you was her man. I—I thought she was too purty and lak an angel foh dat.

[Pheelie *looks at him tearfully and he gazes back warmly.*]

Enos [*angrily*]: Look out, nigger, mind whut you's up to!

Pheelie: Enos, you quit talking to dat boy lak dat.

Enos [*coming up to her and catching her by the arm*]:Come on now and let dat fellow go on whah he's started.

Pheelie [*springing up*]: Turn me a-loose. He's

gwine stay right heah if he wants to and eat and sleep to boot.

ENOS [*hesitating a moment and then flaring out, his timidity and slowness gone*]: De hell you say! [*He turns suddenly towards the boy and points off to the left.*] You see 'way, 'way yonder in de west whah de sun is setting in de tops of dem long-straw pines?

BOY [*questioningly*]: Yeh, yeh, I sees it.

ENOS [*moving towards him*]: Well, I wants you to git in dat road and in three minutes start dere.

PHEELIE [*putting herself quickly before him*]: He ain't, I tells you.

BOY [*emboldened by* PHEELIE'S *protection*]: You means you wants to run me off befo' I gits any rations?

ENOS: I don't keer whedder you gits any rations or not. I wants you to leave heah befo' you gits Pheelie all tore up wid yo' foolish notions. [*Snapping.*] You better git from heah!

BOY [*swinging his stick before him and smiling with weak grimness*]: Ah—hah—I ain't gwine. [ENOS *makes another step towards him.*] Don't you come towards me. I'll split yo' haid open wid dis heah stick.

[*Enos stops and eyes him cautiously. The boy holds his stick in trembling readiness.*]

PHEELIE [*getting between them*]: I tells you, Enos Atkins, you ain't gwine harm nary a hair of dis boy's head. You do and I'll scratch yo' eyes out apt as not.

ENOS: God A'mighty! done hyp'otized wid him a'ready, is you? [*In a wheedling tone.*] Now, boy, cain't you see how 'tis wid me? We was des' ready

to go off to church, and heah you pops up and sets yo'se'f in 'twixt us. [*He feels in his pockets and pulls out a dollar.*] Heah, take dis dollar and go on. You kin buy enough grub wid it to last you a week.

Boy [*breaking into a loud derisive laugh*]: Ain't he a sight trying to har me off from his gal!

Enos: Dem dere laughs is lakely gwine be tacks in yo' coffin. [*The boy closes his eyes in merriment. With a quick movement* Enos *snatches his stick from him.*] Now see'f you don't strak a trot up dat road. [*He puts out his arm and pushes* Pheelie *back.* Egypt *is heard off the left pawing the ground and shaking his bridle.*] Whoa, Egyp'!

Boy [*half whimpering*]: Don't hit me wid dat stick.

Enos: I kin't gwine hit you if you lights a rag out'n heah dis minute. Scat, or I'll wring yo' neck. Make yo'se'f sca'ce, nigger.

Pheelie: Let him 'lone, let him 'lone, I tells you!

Boy: You better go 'tend to yo' hoss, bo. I heah him trying to git loose.

Enos [*looking appealing at* Pheelie]: Egypt's gitting restless, Pheelie. You 'bout ready to be driving now? [*He steps to the left and calls.*] Whoa, whoa dere, Egyp'! Come on, Pheelie, and le's go.

Pheelie [*shaking her head determinedly*]: I ain't gwine on no drive wid you, and dat's my last say.

Enos: Oh, hell fiah! [*He lowers his stick. At the left he turns and speaks.*] You des' wait heah, you little pole-cat, and I'll fix you yit.

[*He hurries out.*]

Boy [*turning boldly back into the yard*]: Hunh, dat nigger ain't nothing but bluff.

PHEELIE: And he ain't gwine make you leave nuther. You stay right wid him.

BOY: He thinks you's gitting to laking me, dat's whut he thinks.

[*He falls to staring at her intently.*]

PHEELIE: Why you look at me lak dat?

BOY [*shyly*]: How old is you?

PHEELIE: Seventeen.

BOY [*joyously*]: Is? Den we's des' de same age. Cain't—cain't I call you Pheelie?

PHEELIE [*looking at the ground*]: Yeh, yeh, you kin.

BOY: I feels des' lak I knowed you all my life, and I ain't never seed nobody lak you in all my progueings, nobody—and I's traveled a heap too.

PHEELIE: And you's seed a monstrous lot whah you traveled, ain't you? Yeh, you has, I bet.

BOY: I has dat—Lawd, Lawd!

PHEELIE [*dropping into the rocking chair*]: Has you seed any big rivers and waters and sich?

BOY: Rivers! Lawd, yeh!

PHEELIE: Has you been by a place whah a great river pours over a steep hill roaring lak de judgment day?

BOY [*dropping on his knees and marking in the dirt as he ponders*]: I dunno— Yeh, yeh, dat river was two miles wide and you had to stop yo' yurs in a mile of it.

PHEELIE: Go on, go on, tell me some mo'. Has you been in any big towns?

BOY: Has I? I's been in town dat had streets so long dey wan't no coming to de end of 'em.

PHEELIE: Was dey many people dere?

Boy: People! People! [*He rolls over on the ground at the remembrance of it and then sits up.*] All kinds and sizes. People running, people walking, some wearing diamont dresses and gold shoes. Rich, my, my, how rich! Ortymobiles as big as dat house wid hawns dat jar lak a earfquake and b'iler busting all at onct.

Pheelie [*a little dubiously*]: Aw—

Boy: Hit's so. And street cyars running wid nothing pulling or pushing 'em. And buildings so high dat de moon breshes de top. High! Lawd, Lawd, how high! And people hauling money wid trains, big train loads whah dey keeps it in a big house wid a school breaking of folks to gyard it.

Pheelie: I been looking at pitchtures in dis book, but nothing fine as dat.

[*She brings the book and shows it to him.*]

Boy [*somewhat disturbed*]: Yeh, I's gut a book lak dat. [*He begins picking his teeth meditatively with a straw.*] It was give to me by a peddling man. [*Smiling wisely.*] But dat was befo' I went out traveling foh myself. Lawd, Lawd, 'pared to what I's seed in New Yawk dat book ain't nothing.

Pheelie: New Yawk! You been dere?

Boy: Dat I has. She's a long ways yonder too, mebbe two hundred miles, who knows? But, Pheelie, dat's de place to go, everything easy, people good to you, nothing to do but eat ice cream and mebbe now and den drink lemonade—and see people, people! worse'n de fair at Dunn. Never seed sich a mess of people.

[*Enos is heard quieting his horse.*]

PHEELIE: How'd you travel so fuh and pay yo' way? Must take a lot of money.

BOY: I walked, dat's how, bum my way. And when I gits hongry I plays my harp.

PHEELIE: Whah you sleep?

BOY: You don't know nothing 'bout traveling, does you? I sleep on de warm ground. Come sunset, I stops in a hollow and breaks down bushes and rakes up pinestraw and sleeps lak a log. And in de mawning I wakes and sees de jew on everything and heah de birds singing, and I lies dere a while and practice on my harp. Den I's off down de road breaving de fine air and feeling des' as happy as I kin.

PHEELIE [*vehemently*]: I done told Enos we could do lak dat. I sho' has told him time and ag'in.

BOY: Would you lak to live dat a-way?

PHEELIE: Unh—hunh, yeh, oh, yeh, I would.

BOY [*earnestly*]: Why cain't you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE [*twisting her hands nervously*]: I dunno —I wants to—I do wants to go and keep on gwine.

BOY [*leaning quickly forward*]: Pheelie, Pheelie, come on wid me and go tromping through de world. You kin leave dat bench-leg Enos behime.

PHEELIE [*turning impulsively towards him and then dropping her head*]: I cain't do it, I's 'fraid to.

[*Enos slips in at the left rear and watches them.*]

BOY: I tell you we would have de best time gwine. Come on and go wid me.

PHEELIE [*hesitating*]: I—mought do it—I's half tempted to do it.

BOY [*catching her hand*]: I tells you whut—how 'bout me waiting out in de woods dere till dark

comes down and den you kin put on a old dress and j'ine me?

PHEELIE [*pulling her hand unwillingly from him*]: Dat'd be fine—fine, but wouldn't folks raise cain?

BOY: Let 'em. Whut you'n me keer? We'll be splashing in de rain and shouting in de sun. And we'll step along togedder, and I'll hold yo' purty little hand and you'll hold mine, and I'll teach you to sing songs. I knows a bushel of purty ones. And den I'll learn you how to blow my harp. And we'll slip down de roads at sunrise and sunset, singing and blowing de finest chunes dey is. Please'm say you'll go wid me.

PHEELIE [*with shining eyes*]: You has de purtiest talk of any man or boy I ever seed, and, oh, I wish —wish— [*With sudden abandon.*] Yeh, yeh, I will—I will, I'll go.

[*Ecstatically he touches her arm and looks straight into her eyes.*]

BOY [*cooingly*]: Birdie mine, birdie mine.

[*He stands up and bends over her chair.*]

PHEELIE [*her face alight as she leans her head against him*]: Oh, it makes my haid swim to think of all we's gwine see and heah.

[*He timidly puts his arm over her shoulder.* ENOS *throws his stick behind him, springs forward and snatches the* BOY *away from* PHEELIE.]

ENOS: Heah, you low-down rascal, trying to steal my gal, is you? Oh, yeh, I been heahing whut you said. [*His nostrils dilating.*] And I's gwine give you a kick in the seat of yo' britches dat'll send you whah you's gwine.

BOY [*retreating behind* PHEELIE]: I ain't trying to steal her nuther. She don't keer nothing foh you and wants to go on wid me.

ENOS: Dat's a lie, you little ficey fool, and you better look out befo' I gives you de lock-jaw.

BOY: She much as said she don't love you, now den.

ENOS: You didn't say dat, did you, Pheelie?

PHEELIE: I dunno whah I loves you or not.

ENOS [*turning savagely upon the boy*]: Damn yo' soul, gut a notion to ham-string you. [*He makes a movement towards the boy, who darts over to the left, sees his walking-stick, and seizes it.*] You des' come heah rolling off yo' lies by de yard and tear up everything! Why don't you leave? Want me to bring out a fedder bed and wash yo' feet and sing to you and fan you and put you to sleep, does you? [*Jumping forward.*] I'll put you to sleep!

BOY [*falling quickly behind* PHEELIE *and drawing his stick*]: You make anudder move at me and I'll scrush yo' skull.

PHEELIE [*crying out*]: Enos, stop dat, stop dat!

ENOS [*sarcastically*]: Yeh, and who's you to order me—you lost every ray of sense you ever had! Wouldn't you be a purty fool running off wid dis heah woods-colt and sleeping in de jambs of fences and old hawg beds and scratching fleas lak a mangy hound! [*His voice rising high in wrath.*] Dat you would. And in winter weather you'd have yo' shirt-tail friz to you hard as arn. You'd be a sight for sore eyes!

PHEELIE: Shut up.—Boy, I wouldn't let him call me no woods-colt.

BOY [*weakly*]: Don't you call me dat.

ENOS [*taking off his coat*]: Call you dat! I ain't started yit. I's gwine twist off bofe yo' yurs and make you eat 'em widdout no salt. Hell, you ain't gut no mo' backbone dan a ground-puppy.

BOY [*trembling and clinging to his stick*]: Pheelie, Pheelie, don't let him git at me.

PHEELIE: Don't you hurt dat boy, I tells you ag'in.

ENOS [*laughing brutally*]: Hurt him! I's gwine crucify him. [*He begins circling* PHEELIE. *The* BOY *keeps on the opposite side.* ENOS *reaches out and pulls* PHEELIE *behind him.*] Now, my little son of a gun, whah is you?

BOY [*in desperation raising his stick*]: Don't you come neah me.

[ENOS *makes a dart at him. The* BOY *starts to flee, but as* ENOS *clutches him, he turns and brings his stick awkwardly down on his head.* ENOS *staggers and falls to his knees.*]

PHEELIE [*looking on in amazement a moment and then screaming*]: Lawd, you's kilt Enos!

[*She stands in uncertainty, and then runs and holds him to her.*]

BOY [*in a scared voice as he drops his stick*]: Muhcy, whut's I gwine do? Is—is you hurt, Enos?

[ENOS *groans.*]

PHEELIE: Git out'n heah, you, you. You's murdered my husband. Enos, Enos, honey baby, is you hurt bad?

[*He groans again and she helps him to a chair.*]

ENOS [*twisting his head from side to side*]: Hurt? Nothing but a little crack. Dat lizard ain't strong enough to kill a flea wid a sledge hammer. [*He*

suddenly whirls around and runs his tongue out, snarling at the Boy.] Ya-a-a-h! [*The* Boy *bounds backwards and, tripping over the bench, falls sprawling on the ground.*] See dere, blowing my breaf on him th'ows him into fits.

. . [*The* Boy *lies stretched out still.*]

Pheelie: O, my Lawdy, you—I believes he's daid or something!

Enos [*trying to hide his fear*]: Sho' nothing but de breaf knocked out'n him.

Pheelie [*shrilly, as she bends above the boy*]: He's hurt, I tells you. Po' boy. [*Turning towards* Enos.] Whut if you's kilt him?

Enos [*rubbing his head*]: Shet up, he ain't hurt bad.

Pheelie: You hateful mule-beating rascal, he is hurt. [*Moaning over him.*] Oh, my sweet honey-boy.

Boy [*sitting up*]: Jesus, dat fall jarred de wind out'n my stomach. [*Suddenly getting to his feet and eyeing* Enos *fearfully.*] Don't let dat man make at me.

Pheelie: I don't reckon he will. You gi'n him a dost to last foh a while.

Enos [*standing up*]: A dost! Hunh, he cain't faze me wid no little tap on de skull. [*He begins rolling up his sleeves. There is a hail off at the right front.*] And now I rolls up my sleeves foh de hawg-killing.

Pheelie: You all stop dat rowing now. Yonder comes somebody.

[*The* Boy *reaches down and gets his harp out of the dirt.*]

Enos: Who is dat? Some old 'oman in a steer cyart.

Boy [*looking up hastily*]: Lawd Jesus, dat's—who's

dat! Hide me, people, hide me quick so's she cain't git to me. [*He looks around him in terror.*] Whah must I go?

PHEELIE: Why you scared of her?

BOY: Pheelie, put me somewhah, civer me quick!

PHEELIE: Drap down on yo' knees, she's coming up de paf. Better git behime de house mebbe.

BOY [*on his all-fours*]: And if she axes foh me, don't you tell her.

PHEELIE: We'll tell her we ain't seed hair nor hide of you. But I cain't see why you so tore up. [*He crawls rapidly off at the left rear around the house.*] Now, Enos, you keep yo' mouf closed. Dey's something up—dat boy 'fraid so.

OLD WOMAN [*calling off the right front*]: Heigho!

ENOS: Dey is something up, and my s'picions is coming to de top.

PHEELIE: Heigho!

[*A stout old negress, dressed in rough working clothes, comes in at the right. She carries a long heavy switch in her hand with which she cuts at the ground as she talks.*]

OLD WOMAN: How you all come on?

PHEELIE: Well as common, and how does you?

OLD WOMAN: Well, I thanky. I's looking foh my boy—seen anything of him?

PHEELIE [*slowly*]: What sorter boy?

OLD WOMAN: Lawd, take me all day to gi'n you a pitchture of him. He's des' de no'countest fellow ever was bahn. He goes round playing a harp, and he's not des' right in his haid. He talks wild 'bout being off and traveling everywhah, and he ain't

never been out'n Hornett County. Gut all dat mess out'n pitchture books and sich.

[*A delighted grin begins to pass over* ENOS' *face.* PHEELIE *looks dejectedly at the ground.*]

PHEELIE [*in a choked voice*]: I ain't seed him nowhah.

OLD WOMAN [*watching her closely*]: I whupped him t'udder day 'caze he so sorry, and he run off. And when I ketches him dis time I's gwine cyore him foh good and all. You say you ain't seed him?

PHEELIE [*looking up*]: Naw'm.

OLD WOMAN [*eyeing her*]: Dat's quare. I thought I seed somebody lak him standing heah in de yard. Last house down de road said he passed dere a hour ago, and dey ain't no road to turn off.

PHEELIE [*persistently*]: Naw'm, I ain't seed him. [*Unseen by* PHEELIE, ENOS *makes a signal to the* WOMAN *that the* BOY *is behind the house. Looking off.*] Mebbe he went by when we wan't looking.

[*The* WOMAN *darts around the house and is heard crying out.*]

OLD WOMAN: Ah—hah—heah you is, heah you is!

PHEELIE: How'd she find out he's dere?

[*There is the sound of blows followed by loud crying.*]

ENOS: Listen at him cry, de baby!

PHEELIE [*who has started towards the rear*]: Quit yo' laughing. [*She chokes with sobs.*] You set her on him, dat's whut you done. And I'll help him out, she shain't beat him so.

[*She meets the* OLD WOMAN *coming in lead-*

ing the boy by the collar. He is crying like a child.]

OLD WOMAN [*yelling at him*]: Dry up! [*He stops his sobbing and looks off ashamed.*] Now ain't you a mess to be running off and leaving me all de cotton to chop! [*Looking around her.*] Well, we's gut to be moving, and I's gwine gi'n you a beating whut is a beating when you gits home.

ENOS: Whah you live?

OLD WOMAN: Down near Dukes.

ENOS: Oh-ho, I thought mebbe from yo' boy's talk you was from New Yawk or de moon or somewhah.

OLD WOMAN: I be bound he's been lying to you. He cain't tell de truf. De devil must a gut him in de dark of de moon. [*She brings the switch across his legs. He shouts with pain.*] Step on now!

[*He struggles against her and holds back.*]

BOY: Pheelie, Pheelie, help me, cain't you?

PHEELIE [*raising a face filled with wrath*]: Help you! Dat I won't. [*Coming up to him and glaring in his face.*] You dirty stinking rascal, why you fool me so?

OLD WOMAN [*giving him another cut*]: You put a move on you or I'll frail de stuffing out'n you.

[*They move off towards the right front, he looking back and holding out his hands to* PHEELIE.]

BOY: Pheelie, don't turn agi'n me so. Pheelie!

[*They go out.*]

ENOS [*going up to* PHEELIE]: Honey, don't—don't be mad now. See, if it hadn't been foh me, apt as not you'd a-let dat little fool gut you to gwine off wid him.

[PHEELIE *bursts into wild sobs. He pulls her head against his breast, but she shakes herself from him. The loud voice of the* OLD WOMAN *is heard outside.*]

OLD WOMAN: You git in dat cyart or I'll Pheelie you!

PHEELIE: I don't want—I ain't never gwine to speak to you agi'n! Oh, he's done gone! [*She runs to the right and calls down the road.*] Heigh, Boy! Boy!

BOY [*his voice coming back high and faint*]: Pheelie-ee-ee!

[PHEELIE *falls on the bench, sobbing in uncontrollable grief.* ENOS *stands looking at her with a wry smile while he gingerly rubs his bruised head. After a moment he goes over to her and puts his arms around her. They are still around her when the curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN

ROSE WINDOWS

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ROSE WINDOWS

by

STARK YOUNG

[MISS LYMAN *clears her throat. There is a pause. She gives the impression that there must be a hundred reasons why she should clear her throat and why there should be a pause.*]

THE JUDGE: Well?

MISS LYMAN: Well, surely you could not expect me to let such a thing pass as has been said to me. I've no wish to be unreasonable of course, but—

DOLLY: What was said to her, for heaven's sake? Haven't I already said that what I said—?

THE JUDGE [*looks up patiently*]: Yes, yes, my daughter, no need to hash all this over again, if you'll pardon me. I reckon we've about talked it out with all this thrashin' about. It's only natural you all should get different impressions of what happened. No three people ever see the same thing the same way.

MISS LYMAN: On the contrary, it seems to me that one may, with care, of course, get an entirely just impression of things.

[*It seems to her ridiculous that one should admit that one has been unable to train oneself to be impartial in one's judgments.*]

THE JUDGE: No doubt, no doubt, but I reckon there're a lot of ways of figurin' that. [*This reckless disregard for his English is one of the things that prove to* MISS LYMAN *her advantage over the* JUDGE.] It's a power of a temptation God A'mighty's given us to see things our own way, lock, stock and barrel, every mother's son of us. Yes, 'tis. However, that's not the object of our meeting now, is it?

[JUDGE DAVIS *is from Mississippi, as you can tell from his broad, soft speech. He stands in his little New York study—the plainest little room in the world—and walks about in it, considering his guests, before whom he has almost come to his rope's end. He has a way of rubbing his hands together and is doing it now.*

The three of them are scattered along the right side of the room, sitting in their separate seats very firmly. It is plain from every one's manner that every one is very much apart from every one else, and that it is the JUDGE'S *business to bring them together again. And it is clear that any one else would be in despair over things as they stand. But the* JUDGE'S *rope has no end; and just now he is the only one easy at heart in the whole jamboree, as they would say in Mississippi.*

MISS LYMAN *sits in front of him, being by nature one of those women who always seem to be directly in front of you, to be standing, indeed, on your toes, if it were not for the fact that she stands so firmly back from*

her own. She wears a brown tailored suit, one of those buy-really-one-good-thing kind of suits that belong to the careful; and she has a trim, straight-brimmed hat with short ostrich tips, nose-glasses, and brown gloves. A fur stole is about her shoulders and she carries what looks like a small leather case. The two other visitors are New Yorkers from the West; but Miss Lyman, *though she lives in New York, is a Bostonian. You can see that she is very much the lady in her own sort of way; the kind of person who will never advance too rapidly. Her general inclination, no doubt, runs toward making the world safe for spinsters, or, as she would put it, for the proprieties. She aims at being Back Bay and is, in fact, a good deal more so than most of her models at home. As for her face, when she is old she will look for all the world like Henry Ward Beecher in a bonnet; even now about her expression she has the same odd effect of a crazy ego that he had. There is something, too, about the way she holds her head that makes you certain that later she will have a wart on her chin. And with it all, she is a fine sort of body, bent on improving the world, strong to restrain any unreasonable happiness in herself; and, however intellectual she may or may not be, thoroughly conscientious about having a mind. Already the* Judge *really likes her because she is somehow so pathetic.*

The other lady is a full dozen years younger,

which may very well be a part of her offense on this occasion, for the youth blossoming in her face is riotous and she can no more hide her light than a rose bush can in June. She has a wide hat of light blue satin with a feather of darker blue; and wears a long cape of what she calls Alice Blue, with fur trimmings. A fur muff lies on her lap. Farther back sits the hero, defiantly, with a heroic ego in operation. JUDGE DAVIS *turns to them again.*]

THE JUDGE: So you think none of my ideas are acceptable, don't you, Dolly? Or you, Son, what's your name, Hugh?

DOLLY [*shortly*]: Yes, Hugh.

THE JUDGE: And you don't think my ideas'll do, either, Hugh? [HUGH *shakes his head. At this* DOLLY *gives a little jump of pride, independence and resentment, and says, tremulously*]: "No, sir, I don't think they are at all." [*The* JUDGE *looks at* MISS LYMAN, *but she does not undertake a discussion. She cannot be expected to approve such a show of feeling as these young people from the West are apt to make, not to speak of the present-generation-ness of them. On the one hand, if she herself felt so little she would be too sincere to express so much; on the other hand, if she felt so much she would feel too deeply to express it at all, and there you are. That lets her out both ways. It is really we who feel that this has got to be seen through. We could manage with* DOLLY *and* HUGH. *They could cry it out or pout or fight it out, and who would be the worse? But* MISS LYMAN, *though she is not*

in the least cross about it, is determined to settle this affair constructively. She knows, though she may be an abstainer herself, the unstable value of tears and temper and all that, the emotional life of idle people. If it weren't for her we'd be letting the play go hang, to get worked out any old way, in the Western style or as they would do in JUDGE DAVIS' *own Mississippi. But no, we are in now, and must see it through with* MISS LYMAN. JUDGE DAVIS *wishes she were in Guinea, but you would never know it from his manner. All this is what makes the* JUDGE *so important. He makes a long pause before he speaks, and it would be well for the actor who is the* JUDGE *to remember that there would be no story at all—or certainly at least the* JUDGE *could never be in it—if it did not all happen in a wistful, whimsical vein that implies how wholly lovable and silly and tragic life is, with its little egotisms and self-centers and their storms and fantasies and poignant remembrances and things only half said.*]

"Well, this, of course, is the kind o' thing it's easy enough to be smart about. Firing words at each other. But we can be too smart. As my ole mammy used to say to me—yas, she said, smart where the skin's off. You won't mind my plain speakin', I'm sure. Then it's this way: We can all see what's happened. Dolly has told me all about it. As a friend of her father's—you see I knew Dolly's father way back yonder, before he ever went to the West. He was a great soldier, Nat was, yes, sirree, Nat Kidder was a great soldier—prettiest boy at sixteen you ever saw, not afraid of anything, no, sirree—well, where

were we? Oh, yes—well, we were at—Well, weren't we?—well, a few days ago this row—

[Miss Lyman *sits up straighter, and the* Judge *pretends not to notice it at all.*]

The Judge: I'd hardly call it a street brawl. Say, misunderstanding then. And then Dolly tells somebody about it. And you doubtless discussed it with some friend, Miss Lyman. And Hugh, too. And now both sides have got it all worked up, inside and outside, worked up into a stew such as we never heard tell of; and Dolly is insulted and Hugh is insulted; and Miss Lyman knows she has not been treated properly.

Miss Lyman [*gives that little laugh of the clear conscience and assured fact*]: Rather obvious, I should think.

The Judge: And what's to come of it? The first thing you know, a powerful rumpus, that's what. More talk, more people taking sides, aye God!—I beg your pardon, ladies. More and more,—why, Dolly, didn't your aunt advise a breach of promise suit? To bring us to law, that's up-to-date, anyhow.

Dolly: How on earth did you know that? I'm sure I never told you, Judge. I haven't told anybody. Besides, why should I care?

The Judge: Precisely. Why should you? But the question is, do you? There are other fish to fry, plenty of young men—but, but, but! At any rate, I've asked you all to come over here and talk this over with me, and you've come. And we've talked. Why have the whole town talkin' about it? Whyn't we settle it? We may be all barkin' up the wrong

tree as well as not. No, sir, better stop this affair right here now before it goes any further. And so we must talk of another way. Yes, sir, another way. Let's see—let's see— [*It begins to look as if nobody saw anything. The* JUDGE *begins to walk up and down a moment, and sings without much tune to speak of*]:

The miller's big dog lay on the barn floor
And Bango was his name.

[*Then he looks at them.*] Well? [*But nobody replies. He begins again to walk up and down and sings again before he speaks.*] The miller's big dog lay on the barn floor—I'll just tell you all what I think. After all, you see, I'm a good deal older than you young people— [*The sly old thing gives a covered glance at* MISS LYMAN *to see how it takes, but she gives no sign of having heard the remark; perhaps she rather expects these Southerners to butter it on. But the* JUDGE *gets the impression that it does no harm, so he tries it again.*] After all, you young people—[MISS LYMAN *puts her hand up lightly and smooths her hair back*] might give years and experience a little credit and advantage. I'm old enough to be the grandfather of all three of you, so put that in your pipe and smoke it. I'm not a rich man, of course—no Southern gentleman in my generation could be a rich man, he has so many poor kin to help out—but I've had a pretty happy life, I reckon. And I've often wondered what'd a happened if once or twice I'd just got my back up and kep' it there. Not that I don't believe in pride. There're some things I haven't done merely because they were not good enough for me. We're such

animals that pride is one o' the best ways to hold us decent. But still—I don't have to make an oration on the subject, do I? Tell you my idea—I calculate might be the best thing for everybody to tell exactly how it was, just what happened; and then we may all understand things better. What do you think o' that, Miss Lyman?

MISS LYMAN [*with the air of a lady who has understood but thinks that people on principle should be forced, if need be, to make themselves clear*]: I'm not sure I understand you, Judge Davis.

DOLLY: She gets you perfectly, Judge.

[MISS LYMAN *stiffens a little.*]

THE JUDGE: I mean we'll take each one in turn and hear just what happened as he recalls it. Hey! Well? [MISS LYMAN *bows her approval and the* JUDGE *turns to the others.*] Hugh? Well, Son?

HUGH: Suits me, Sir.

JUDGE: Dolly, will you?

DOLLY: I should like to, Judge, indeed I should.

THE JUDGE: Good! Very good indeed! Well, then, we'll just hear it, how it went. Well, then, who'll be first? It's an ungrateful business— [*He waits and hardly makes a move.*] It's hardly pleasant.

[MISS LYMAN *moves to the call. If there's something unpleasant to be done she hopes she has the "character" to essay it.*]

MISS LYMAN: I'll be the first if you like, Judge Davis.

THE JUDGE: Well, now that's capital. Miss Lyman will give her account first. Just wait till I get my chair. [*The phonograph, somewhere there across*

the court, begins a song.] I'll just shut this window, the music has started. That man takes every new record he gets like a new baby in the house. Now—come along, don't be afraid of your horses. Miss Lyman [*leans slightly forward and begins*]: Well, this is exactly what occurred. I was—

[*The room fades away into darkness. And there appears out of the shadow a scene in front of a bookshop. It is really a sort of book and print shop. On the screens just inside the glass are books, framed pictures, calendars, colored prints fastened up with tacks, though what one really notices is the fine binding displayed. Everything really is books, books. It is spring, you can see it some way or other, no matter how, perhaps by the shining window panes. A young man stands looking at the prints and books. He wears a soft hat and a neat gray overcoat, beneath which show the navy blue legs of his trousers. A lady approaches from the right. She is a lady of much quiet distinction and reserve, her brown suit is man-tailored, reserved, not too much in the New York style. The leather case for books and papers has the same quiet perfection of taste shown by the black gloves and the unobtrusive dignity of the carriage. Tooled leather is in good taste. There is nothing particularly distinctive about the young man in front of the shop. But he is looking at the window and perhaps cares for books, for serious reading. And he is doubtless one of our boys just out of the service.*

The lady on her way to the door of the shop, stops and speaks to him, a charming cultured voice, like a flute with a Ph.D.] Miss Lyman: Good morning! [*The young man answers rather clumsily.*] Good morning—er—Miss! Good morning! [Miss Lyman *makes it easier for him.*] Pardon me, but I saw you looking at the books. I concluded that perhaps you might be interested to know of our reading-rooms—at our church.

Hugh: Oh? Why, thank you, mam. [*These absurd Western people will say mam.*] Thank you, mam.

Miss Lyman [*quietly gracious*]: Perhaps you would like to come there and read!

[*You would scarcely expect a boy like this to be polished, but it might be taken for rather ungraceful, to say the least, the manner that he exhibits. He looks at* Miss Lyman *rather objectively and says*]:

Hugh: Well, some time or other I reckon I might, thank you. I was really just lookin' at the pictures here and expectin' a friend. It wan't the books.

Miss Lyman [*with the air of a lady who is willing to let much pass*]: Ah, I see. At any rate, let me give you the address. I have it here on some cards. You must try and come. The rooms are open until nine every night. It's a cozy place, too, and all kinds of good reading.

Hugh: Readin'? [*She wishes young people would pronounce the final g.*] Thank you, mam. A chap could read there and then go out somewhere afterwards to a show, couldn't he?

Miss Lyman: If you like. You were one of our boys, weren't you?

Hugh [*without any interest evidently*]: Service, you mean?

Miss Lyman: Yes, in the Great War, certainly, for humanity.

Hugh: Well, yes, I was, sort o' fought, I guess. But not now, of course. What's over's over—

Miss Lyman: Perhaps. Well, then, I may leave you this address? [*A young woman has approached from down the street somewhere—who knows where from her looks?—and is standing on the right (as the audience looks at the stage.) She wears a loud hat of bright blue satin with showy feathers. Her blue cape is even louder and more extreme and vulgar than the hat, the fur trimming worse if possible than the feather. Her muff—well, what can you expect? She wears huge black earrings and has blacked her eyes and painted herself red as a fire-engine. As for her lips! She rolls her eyes about with outrageous coquetry and abandon. In a word, it is easy to see that she is no better than she should be. The kind of person one would gladly help, if possible, but would scarcely discuss. The less said of her the better, though it would be a mistake to blame the poor boy. The first lady gives the young person a glance and then pays no further attention to her. The slight changes by which this* Dolly—*and* Hugh *and* Miss Lyman *later on—take on another effect, should be clear. A hat, a cape, an expression on a face, is like and yet not like another that we had just seen on the same person, and what a difference in the impression we get! Neatly, dis-*

tinctly, the differences must be made, with every economy of means; the economy is part of the wit of the situation. The person clears her throat, obviously to attract attention. No one notices her, we are glad to say.] Then you'll come, perhaps?

HUGH: Yes mam, and thanks. Sure, any old night.

[*The person in the satin hat clears her throat again brazenly.*]

MISS LYMAN [*getting into the swing of a lady who has made a coaching trip through England*]: You get off the tube at Herald Square.

[*Here she is interrupted by the young woman's going up to the soldier and snatchin him rudely by the arm. He is torn suddenly from the lady's side, who stands looking at the pair of them in astonishment, naturally. The young person speaks with insufferable familiarity to the young man.*]

DOLLY: Hello, Hugh, hello! [*And jerks him by the arm. And what a pert voice she has! The soldier turns and grins at her*]: Hello, Dolly, old dear; just a minute.

[MISS LYMAN *with difficulty controls herself. She steps backward a few paces. She is hardly accustomed to seeing people jerk each other about in this manner. The young man returns to the matter of the address.*]

HUGH: Zat right? 322, that's right?

[MISS LYMAN *bows.*]

HUGH [*seeming to think he must introduce people*]: Dolly, this is Miss—er—excuse me—

MISS LYMAN: Miss Lyman.

HUGH: This is Miss Lyman. And this is Miss Dolly Kidder, friend o' mine.

DOLLY: So glad to meet you, Miss Lyman.

[*Like a little snapping turtle really.*]

MISS LYMAN [*is prepared for anything*]: How do you do? And I'm afraid I must be going.

DOLLY [*airily, tossing her head*]: Oh, please don't let me break up the party, I'll be going.

HUGH [*keeping up the situation plausibly*]: Why, no, Dolly, wait a minute, can't you? We were just—

DOLLY [*is as pert as ever*]: Just what? I couldn't seem to make you hear me.

HUGH: I was just getting the address.

MISS LYMAN [*will do what she can to prevent a possible misinterpretation*]: The address of the reading-rooms.

DOLLY: Never knew Hugh was so literary. But it's not my affair whose room he gets the address of and whose he doesn't. But I won't stay and spoil the chat. Two's a company—

HUGH [*seems to be an honest young fellow. He turns to the person, really puzzled by her behavior*]: Why, Dolly, what's the matter?

DOLLY: Nothing, Hugh; why, nothing.

HUGH: Must be. You've never acted like this before.

DOLLY: Haven't I? Well, I do now.

HUGH: But, Dolly, don't go like that!

DOLLY: I will! [*She sticks out her tongue at* MISS LYMAN, *who is greatly embarrassed at being forced to be present at such a scene.*] Why don't you go read with her? Go on!

[*The little wretch!*]

HUGH [*crudely*]: But nobody wants to go with her, I tell you! That's what I'm telling you a dozen times!

[DOLLY *stamps her foot with temper.* MISS LYMAN *stands with quiet self-control.*]

DOLLY: Didn't look like it just now, did it?

HUGH: Why, you're not jealous, are you, Dolly?

DOLLY [*gives the laugh of scorn*]: Jealous? Not at all. He flatters himself!

HUGH: Dolly!

DOLLY: Oh, better find out now than later!

HUGH: Let me explain, why don't you! I did explain.

MISS LYMAN [*here intervenes to do what she can*]: Perhaps I could explain.

DOLLY [*turns on her*]: We don't need any of your explanation, my lady! Anybody'd think at your age you'd quit having things to explain.

[MISS LYMAN *takes this insult with marked and dignified silence, a flight of the eyebrows, perhaps, into higher regions of decorum.*]

HUGH [*fumbles with his glove and looks at the young woman in a troubled, kindly manner*]: But, Dolly, you can see—

DOLLY [*vulgarly*]: That's just what I can do, see's the word. See! I'll tell the cockeyed world. [*She goes out, back the way she came, making a scene. The young man moves slowly off in the opposite direction.* MISS LYMAN *goes quietly into the book-shop, to which she had started in the first place. The scene darkens and disappears, and the conversation in the* JUDGE'S *study goes ahead.* DOLLY *seems ready*

to burst.] Well, I like that! So that's her tale! Now, Hugh, I hope you are satisfied! And not one word of it true, either.

Miss Lyman: It's quite simple, merely a question of whose word we are going to take, is it not?—of which of us gives the impression of being more reliable.

The Judge: I know, I know, but there's a passel o' confusion in this sort o' thing. And it's not pleasant to get down in the ring and fight it out. Miss Lyman thinks that unworthy of her, and Dolly wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. But we've got to get it settled. Well—eh, Hugh? Dolly?

Hugh: Maybe, Judge. Wouldn't you say so, Dolly?

Dolly [*sniffs away from him as she replies*]: And maybe not, too!

The Judge: Well, perhaps it'd be better to discuss that later. As the governor of North Ca'lina said to the governor of South Ca'lina, after we've heard everybody.

Dolly: Then I'll tell you just exactly how it really was—I've always had a very good memory for such things. Auntie says I don't miss a trick. [*It is just here that* Miss Lyman *almost loses her mastery over herself and gives a savage kick to her leather case, which she had laid on the floor beside her chair and which now gets in the way of her feet. But she regains her control, looks with calm morality down at the bag as if to make sure that her careful plan for its rearrangement had been successful; and, as she catches the* Judge's *glance on her, she raises her eyebrows to show her unruffled poise. But the scene darkens and the front of the shop reappears. The*

window is mostly full of pictures and gifts, though there may be a few books. You know, books— A young man stands before the window looking in or something. He has a soft hat and a gray overcoat and blue trousers; he is good enough looking, but oh! not so very. At his side is an old maid talking with him in an airy way through her nose. The two of them are leaning their shoulders together about something or other, though you can't hear what they say. Suddenly the sunshine is brighter and the flowers on the plant, that you had not seen before, look brighter, too. The bird in the cage bursts into song, you would almost say for joy and delight, or perhaps he is just singing as birds do. You had not seen him before either, hanging there outside the shop in his brass cage with the Chinese windbells made of glass strips swinging from the bottom, beneath the birdie's floor. The windbell is chiming, too, with the bird. A young lady enters at the right. She stops abruptly, frozen at the sight of the young man and the woman. Frozen stiff! Lovely creature! Soft, fair cheeks! She has a blue hat, as you have already seen, but it is just too sweet, with its blue satin. And the blue cape trimmed with fur is a dream, it's caracul—the fur, or at least it looks like it. The girl herself is like a song. One can't say just who it is she looks like. Is it Mary Pickford? Or Bessie Love? Perhaps something of them both? Features like Mary Pickford, and something shy and sweet in the eyes like Bessie Love. Still there's a touch of style, a little way of pursing up her mouth, a tilt of the head, that neither of these has, something, well—quite one's own. The bird sings, no wonder! The young lady

takes in the other woman at a glance. Sour-looking and frumpy. A lemon. A drab brown suit and a wilted-down hat with straggly black plumes, a fur stole that the cat has licked, black gloves, nose-glasses, of course, and an old leather bag. What feet! What a way of walking! She puts down her feet like rubber stamps. One look suffices to show that there is a flirtation on between the two before the window. Any woman can make a fool of a man; men are such simpletons, vain as they can be! She will not be hasty, however. So much sorrow in life is caused by haste. In Bessie Love's play, for example, if the girl had only— She will trust HUGH. *She stands there wondering what would be the wise and true thing to do. She clears her throat softly—almost gayly, you might say.* HUGH *does not hear her, but goes on talking to the woman. The young lady waits a moment; then tries again with the same ill success. Then she goes up softly and lays the tips of her fingers on his arm, and says, with her clear young voice*]: Hello, Hughie!

[*She smiles. He starts, and looks round. But the smile is stifled on her lips by his cold glance. The man merely turns a second and looks at her and then speaks harshly*:]

HUGH: Hello, Dolly; well, just wait a minute, can't you?

[*His voice like that cuts her to the heart, but she is too proud to show it. And she forces herself to say sweetly.*]

DOLLY: All right; certainly, Hugh.

HUGH [*returns to the woman, in a tender voice*]: That's the address, isn't it?

[*The cattish old thing looks coolly at* DOLLY *and speaks loftily, as if to crow over her.*]

MISS LYMAN: Yes, quite, and do come soon.

HUGH: I'll do that. Soon is right.

[*The woman gives* DOLLY *a lookover and tries to walk away. But* DOLLY *hastens to assure her.*]

DOLLY: Oh, don't let me spoil the party, please. I'll run along.

HUGH: Aw, can't you wait a minute?

MISS LYMAN: Who is this person, may I ask?

[*If she didn't really say this, she looked it, so what's the difference?*]

HUGH: Meet Miss Kidder, Miss Lyman.

MISS LYMAN [*bows stiffly*]: How d'ye do?

DOLLY [*deciding at least to have some manners*]: How do you do, Miss Lyman? I'm glad to meet you.

[*Still she is cool and cutting enough, though she is a lady, she hopes.* MISS LYMAN *steps a little to one side, to head off* HUGH *if he attempts to escape.*]

HUGH: Oh, Dolly, I'm just getting her address.

MISS LYMAN [*tries to put the best face possible on it all*]: Our reading-rooms' address, you mean.

DOLLY [*icily sweet, for she can be that*]: How charming!

MISS LYMAN [*rudely*]: Yes, he's probably more literary than some of us.

DOLLY: Only fancy that. Really? But I am afraid I must be going, you know, really.

[*There's a way of pronouncing* really. *She starts to go, but* HUGH *calls roughly to her.*]

HUGH: Dolly, what's the matter with you?

DOLLY [*hurt but speaking gently*]: Nothing, Hugh; nothing, really.

MISS LYMAN [*gives a short chuckle full of malice, and turns to* DOLLY]: Oh, don't go; I'm going now.

DOLLY [*with tears in her eyes*]: Pray excuse me!

HUGH: Oh, come on, what's up? Jealous? Oh, come on, what's eating you?

DOLLY [*pained and offended*]: No, certainly not. I'm always glad to meet your friends.

HUGH: Rats! You know I don't know this lady.

[*To this obvious lie what can one say? He's bound to know a woman he has just introduced to one. She makes no reply.*]

HUGH: You make me tired! If you want to know.

[*He starts to go.* MISS LYMAN *speaks up, just to keep him, of course.*]

MISS LYMAN: Perhaps I can explain.

DOLLY [*elegantly and firmly, to avoid squabbles*]: My dear Miss Lyman, there's nothing to explain. We're all old enough to know our own affairs. Hugh, don't rush off this way, perhaps there's been a misunderstanding.

HUGH: Damn explanations!

[*He turns from her as she looks beseechingly at him.*]

DOLLY [*holds out her hands pleadingly to him and calls to him*]: Hugh! Hugh!

[*He does not answer, but turns coolly and walks away.* DOLLY *stands holding out her hands to him, but he does not even give a backward glance. The sun's brightness fades from the world; and* DOLLY *stands there*

motionless, in the cold, pitiless light of day. Bird, flowers, the spring light, everything has gone gray. The rival looks at her and goes into the shop with a contemptuous sniff. DOLLY *stands there facing us and looking out with her great sad eyes into a world from which happiness is fled. The scene darkens and the* JUDGE'S *study appears.* DOLLY *sits with her face in her hands.* MISS LYMAN *looks at the* JUDGE *stonily and very much aloof. She takes off her glasses and taps one hand with them. The* JUDGE *looks at* DOLLY *and then at* MISS LYMAN, *as he walks up and down and gives a long sigh.*]

THE JUDGE: So that's how it was?

MISS LYMAN [*slowly*]: To a large extent, I will not say entirely, mere falsehoods!

DOLLY: Don't you see, Judge Davis? What's the use? What's the use—you might have known what she'd say.

HUGH [*remonstrating*]: Dolly!

THE JUDGE: Now, now, it'll be all right. Just everybody hold his horses. I knew a young chap once—but I won't get off into stories. Eh? No—well, then; well, Hugh, there's a powerful lot of evidence, Son, powerful lot o' evidence—

HUGH: Oh, it ain't so much when you get right down to it. What happened is this, see?— [*The scene darkens and the shop reappears. Just the front of a bookshop with some prints of girls' heads, that's all. But a fine-looking young fellow is standing there looking at them. He has a soldier's air but wears now a dashing gray overcoat and a swagger soft hat.*

His shoes are shining, his trousers very smart. But for all that you can see by the way he bears himself that he is every inch a man. Presently a lady enters. The young man looks at her and sees that though she is not beautiful, she is a lady whose attentions anybody might be pleased enough to receive. He is pleased all right enough when she smiles and says: "Good morning!" *A feller's a feller*]. Good morning! [*The lady says something just to start the conversation.* "You like books?"] Yes, mam, I do very much. [*The way she looks at him a fellow would think she was making up; you'd think she'd fallen for you, honest to God, you would. She goes on:* "Well, we got some rooms where you can read." *He nods politely.*] I'm much obliged to you. I'll sure come if you'll gimme the address.

Miss Lyman [*in a softish voice*]: Certainly. This is it. Hop off at some square or other, see?

[*Somebody touches* Hugh *on the arm, and he turns and sees* Dolly, *who has on her blue hat and blue cape and looks mighty pretty this morning.* Hugh *smiles at her.*]

Hugh: Hello, Dolly; you're out early; glad to see you. Just half a second till I get the address of this library.

[*But pretty is as pretty does. And* Dolly *flings away from him.* Miss Lyman *looks haughty. Women are sure funny! The two cut their eyes at each other as if they'd bite their heads off. It's too much for a man to manage, so* Hugh *just waits. Finally when you'd think the whole job not worth three dollars Mexican,* Miss Lyman *speaks.*]

Miss Lyman: I really fear I must go.

Dolly: Oh, don't let me break up the party; I'll beat it.

Hugh: Why, Dolly, don't go, wait a minute and come on with me. Dolly, meet Miss Lyman.

[Miss Lyman *gets on a high-horse and* Dolly *screws up her nose and tosses her head, and all that kind of silly rot.*]

Dolly: Well, I'm gone. So long. [*Nasty as hell.*] Get the address right, Hugh!

Hugh [*offers to show it to her*]: Here, see; here it is.

Dolly [*snaps away from him*]: Thanks. I got plenty of books at home.

[Miss Lyman *turns her back on them.* Hugh *acts like a gentleman all through this scene with the women; his manner is quiet and noble. He turns to* Dolly *pleadingly and begs her not to go like this; he says to her,* "Dolly, don't go like this." Dolly *only shrugs her shoulders.* "You're not jealous, are you, Dolly?" Dolly *laughs.*] You flatter yourself.

Hugh: Dolly!

Dolly: Oh, cut the bull, will you?

Hugh: Oh, Doll!

Dolly: Good-by to you both.

Hugh [*tenderly*]: Don't go 'way that way, Dolly!

[Dolly *flirts herself out.* Hugh *stands looking after her, with his hands held out, begging her to stay. But it's no use. She does not even look back as he goes.* Miss Lyman *has disappeared into the shop or somewhere.* Hugh *stands lighting a cigarette philosoph-*

ically. What can you do? The darkness comes and goes and the study is seen. Miss Lyman *clears her throat. She remains as she was born, unconvinced. But obviously their world is not hers anyhow, so why be further concerned? That boy especially, not at all what he seemed to be in his blue uniform.* Miss Lyman *begins to wonder why she came here. Only because the* Judge *had asked it, of course. One would do the delightful man a service, certainly, if one could. Perhaps if* Miss Lyman *goes now she and the* Judge *can talk it all over sympathetically another time. And she would not be sorry to see these foolish young creatures make it up. All social good depends on concessions mutually made. And they may as well be happy in their romance, if they can, which she doubts.* Miss Lyman *looks at the* Judge. *It would plainly be nice to see him again. The part of tact, then, is just now to take one's departure.*]

Miss Lyman: For my part that is all there is to the matter. [*A clock strikes somewhere and she looks at her watch.*] And I'm afraid I have a lecture appointment.

Dolly: I should think it might be all. He let you out easy enough.

Hugh: Oh, Dolly, I didn't—I just—

The Judge: Now that's fine. Everything's fine. Course, it's not easy. We all know that every mother's son of us is prone to see ourselves in a rosy light and what we do, an' all, but—

Miss Lyman [*who has made this objection once already*]: On the contrary, it seems to me quite possible with effort and thought to be a disinterested critic of oneself.

The Judge: I daresay, I daresay.

Miss Lyman [*smiles what among certain cynical people might be known as "the settlement smile," the lips holding tightly together as the corners of them go up with patient cheer. She was merely trying, after all, to clear matters up, and she is leaving now with no ill feeling*]: Judge Davis, I'm afraid I must be going. I've no ill feeling, I assure you. I'll leave all this to you. What time is it? My watch says 7. My appointment is at 7.45! I'll be glad to talk it over with you another time, Judge. Perhaps at my—

Dolly [*interrupting*]: Righto! Now give him the address of the reading-room. Give it to 'em all. Men dote on reading-rooms.

[*But the* Judge *doesn't somehow seem to hear* Dolly. *He is too deeply concerned that* Miss Lyman *shall not miss her appointment.*]

The Judge [*solicitously*]: 7.45, oh, dear; oh, dear! How you ladies do get about nowadays! You must leave us? Now, that's too bad, too bad! Shall we call a taxi, my dear Miss Lyman?

Miss Lyman: No, I prefer walking, we are so much indoors, modern life, don't you think?

The Judge: Ah, that's it, indeed we are! Well, then—shall I take Miss Lyman to the door; you children will excuse me? Back in two shakes. You talk it over; it's all settled now, of course. It's

hot in here; I better open this window. [*He opens the window with an air of great innocence.* "Yon he is again with his music! Well—" *The song on the phonograph comes louder,* "Silver threads among the gold," *and very much a tenor. Then the* JUDGE *shows* MISS LYMAN *out, after she has made a bow to the two young people, who in reply almost snap at her with their bows.* DOLLY *and* HUGH *stand looking into space and listening to the music, which plainly comes as a flank attack. Monuments of stone are not more implacable than they. Anybody but the* JUDGE *could see that they will never give in. But the* JUDGE *comes back in a moment.*] Well, really, you two children've got to grant me that Miss Lyman is a strong character. And she don't like to admit she can be prejudiced when she passes a judgment. No, sirree. I'm sure I respect her noble womanhood, but she *is* a strong character.

HUGH: Guess that's right, Judge.

THE JUDGE: Well, she's got an appointment anyhow. And, by the way, you children are staying to supper with me. Nettie's got it ready in a minute. Listen at him there with his song, he's breaking our hearts. Darling, I am growing old—and so on. A trifle sentimental, I'm afraid, sweetness long drawn out. However, there are people who seem to like it laid on thick, and every one to his own taste as the old woman said when she kissed the cow. However—Nettie'll have supper in a minute.

HUGH [*looks at* DOLLY, *then turns slowly to the* JUDGE]: But, Judge Davis—

DOLLY [*does the same*]: I'm sorry, Sir, I'd be glad to, but really—

THE JUDGE: No, no, now, I haven't got any children of my own. My dear wife died, you know, very soon—however, Nettie's about ready. Your names are already in the pot.

[*The* JUDGE *goes out.* DOLLY *and* HUGH *stand listening to the song and looking now and then at one another.*]

DOLLY [*at length speaks*]: The same old song. Yep. [*Blurting out after a silence.*] But I thought at least you'd have some taste.

HUGH: Well, now, I don't think she's so bad. Besides—

DOLLY: Don't you?

HUGH: But, Dolly, you've been so unreasonable.

DOLLY: I'm not, it's you.

HUGH: Well, I can't see why, Dolly.

DOLLY: Well, I see why.

HUGH: 'Twan't anything. Such a thing, Doll, I swear might happen any time.

DOLLY: You can say that because you don't love me.

HUGH: You know, of course. Just as you say, Dolly.

DOLLY: No, it's just as *you* say.

HUGH: No, as *you* say.

[*The* JUDGE *puts his head into the door a moment, then closes the door again. The music plays on as they stand looking at each other.* THE JUDGE *knocks at the door, the music comes to a very lyric end, a tenor sob, enough to break all the hearts for blocks around.*]

DOLLY [*throws her arms around* HUGH's *neck and he puts his arms about her*]: Oh, Hugh!

[*The* JUDGE *opens the door and comes in. He is about to speak, but seeing* HUGH *and* DOLLY *together he checks himself. They do not seem to notice him, and after a moment the* JUDGE *himself appears to have forgotten them. He goes over to the window and stands with his back to* HUGH *and* DOLLY. *The* JUDGE *stands looking out of the window, his arms folded in front of him, with one hand supporting an elbow and his chin resting on the palm of the other. After a while* DOLLY *or* HUGH, *one of them or perhaps both, appear to have recovered somewhat from their absorption in their own affair. They turn toward the window, but when* DOLLY *sees the* JUDGE *she lays her hand on* HUGH'S *arm and puts her finger to her lips. Something she sees about the* JUDGE *as he stands there before the window with his old head bowed like that makes her pause—remembrances and things only half said—she drops her hand to her side and stands saying nothing. But the* JUDGE *will not be telling any one what the windows may be that he is looking through to-night; and after a little we see him suddenly come to, remember the occasion at hand, and turn toward* DOLLY *and* HUGH. *"Oh! Bless my soul! here we are foolin' around, come on to supper, you all." He takes their arms and walks between them toward the door.*]

CURTAIN

SPRING SLUICING

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SPRING SLUICING

by

Alice Henson Ernst

CHARACTERS

Joe Belyea (Trapper Joe), an old-time settler in the Yukon wilderness.
Tombstone, an enigma.
"Limpy Jim" Peters, prospector.
Klayquah, a native.

Place: *The Yukon valley.*
Time: *The early 90's.*

Scene: *A creek in the Yukon country, in the days preceding the epic gold rush of the 90's. Low hills, huddled in the distance, are still shrouded with bluish snow; beyond them stretch miles of untouched wilderness. Birch trees and dark tamarack firs march along the banks of the hidden stream, stirring audibly under its slushy ice. Somewhere, not too far away, it joins the wide current of the Yukon, still locked in frozen silence. It is midafternoon in late April. The tense stillness is broken by the sound of an ax, away out of sight up stream. A new wooden sluice-box, propped on low*

trestles, noses its way across the back of the scene. The black profile of a log cabin with flat mud roof jutting over the door, northern fashion, pushes itself into view, left. Massive deer antlers spread widely over the doorway. Tall snowshoes against the casing, a hastily discarded fur parka, some bits of dog harness and a long rifle on the crude porch suggest the return of a hunter. The door is open, and the sound of voices comes from within. No one is in sight as the curtain rises.

TRAPPER JOE [*a huge man, suddenly fills the doorway. Throwing down a well-bound bundle, he looks, frowning a bit, about him; then calls back over his shoulder*]: Peste! W'ere's Klayquah? . . . Put my feenger down on you, den Klayquah's gone, jus' lak beeg flea. . . . You two don' spend much time togedder. [*There is a drawling answer from within, inaudible. As the sound of far-away chopping strikes his ear, he goes down the steps and cupping his hands, calls out*]. Klay-quah! . . . Hyak chahko. . . . Hola! [*A distant "Hola" and the chopping ceases.* JOE, *seating himself, lights a pipe and begins to untie the thongs that hold the bundle. His bronzed face has an intent look of power, back of the slight frown of a weary man, though there is a slight twinkle somewhere about the eyes. He has a small pointed beard; wears a heavy blue shirt, muk-luks (high skin boots), and soft doe-skin trousers stuffed into these. A pile of glistening musk-rat furs fall from the bundle. He counts them, smoothing out*

each one as he puts it by. At the doorway appears the tall, lank figure of a youth of 16 *or* 17, *with shy, morose face, wide temples, brooding dark eyes and a sensitive, cynical mouth. He carries several square bits of wood and a heavy jack-knife. Seating himself on the steps below* JOE, *he begins shaping them into strips without a word.* JOE *placing the last skin on the pile.*] Fourteen . . . feefteen! Wal, Tombstone, w'en you get dose riffle made, an eef de sun he shine some more . . . say two, t'ree day. . . . Bien, we start spring sluicing. [*His helper puts by a slim oblong of wood without comment.*] I wan' for Klayquah men' de sluicebox underneat' de trees, w'ere de deep snow 'ave smash her down. Gar, dese wuz fearful weenter! Seem lak de ice would squeeze de worl' to death . . . break it in two wid long cole feengers. [TOMBSTONE *whittles silently,* JOE *dreamily, the blue haze of his pipe rising plumelike in the still air.*] I hear de reever groanin' in her sleep las' night. She's gon' wake up ver' soon.

TOMBSTONE [*shifting a little*]: Yeah.

JOE [*bending eagerly toward his helper*]: Wat you teenk, Tombstone? You teenk de ice gon' out dese week?

TOMBSTONE. [*after a long silence, cautiously*]: Dunno.

JOE [*laughing*]: Tombstone, you're dam funny feller. Seem lak it hurt you wen you talk. W'y you don' spik lak odder people?

TOMBSTONE [*awkwardly*]: Dunno. [*Pause.*] Jes' always ben that way, I reckon.

JOE: By gar, I am de one wat knows it. All dese mont's we leeve togedder I could mek wan necklace

of your words . . . an' dat would choke me. . . . [*He laughs good-naturedly.*] W'en I pick you up, mos' frozen, way out on de nort' trail . . . far beyon' de las' cabane . . . someteeng de dogs stumble over in de blinding snowstorm. . . . Wal, you couldn' spik den, garçon, no matter if you wan' to. . . . An' you ain' sed much, ever since. [*The boy's silence is painful. His brow contracts as though a recollection had stung him.*] W'y you don' tell ol' Joe wat happen? Look lak some one run away an' lef' you dar . . . seeck, starving. . . . Tell me, garçon . . . who was it?

[*He bends forward and places his hand gently on the lad's arm.*]

TOMBSTONE [*jumps as though touched by a hot iron*]: Quit, I tell ye. I tell ye I can't stand to have folks tech me.

[*His mouth is working strangely.*]

JOE: Garçon, wat ail you? I wuz only try for help you. I do not even know your nam'. You wuz seeck so long. I did not plague you . . . an' you wuz alwuz still . . . jus' lak wan tombstone. An' dat's all right . . . MIN' YOUR OWN BEEZNESS . . . dat's all de ten commandments, here in Yukon. We been froze up in dese leetle valley of de Porc-Epines all weenter . . . jus' you an' me an' Klayquah. It wuz too lonely. I teenk noboddie know wat loneliness can mean wat nevaire know de Yukon weenter. [JOE's *pause is eloquent.*] Dat fearful stillness! Dat bitter cole, day after day, until you feel your bones crack open! Long, empty mont's of weenter w'en de sun don' shine at all, an' snow she's alwuz fallin' down . . . day after day. Sometam it seem

you mus' cry out to spik to some one. Dieu, it's lonesome! [*He stops as though wrenched. The boy has hidden his face in his arms and rocks to and fro monotonously. The stillness of the wilderness cuts like a knife.* Joe, *recalling himself as he looks at the crouched figure.*] But dere, ol' Joe he's chatter, jus' lak bluejay in de trees. . . . You mek me worry. You shut teengs up eenside too much . . . De Yukon, she's not easy for de stranger, wat we call cheechako. . . . Sometam I teenk she hates newcomer. She try dem out. Only de verrie strong can conquer her. De weak ones . . . wal, den bad teengs happen. [*He looks at the lad a moment, then laughs reassuringly.*] By gar, ol' Joe he's mek beeg talk again. Hees mouth lak windmill. Yukon, she's ver' fine country w'en you know her ways. An' dose ol' sourdough man, dey fin' her out all right. Bad beeg wolves lak Joe Belyea wat mek hees leevin' killin' odder wolves . . . odder small creatures wat nevaire do heem any harm! [*He laughs again on a somewhat bitter note as he rises, tapping the last sleek skin of the pile before him.*] Voilà! Dese buy us flapjack flour good many week. [Tombstone's *gaze follows him into the cabin, dazed and furtive. From his pocket, when* Joe *has quietly disappeared, he stealthily draws a piece of money, a newly-minted twenty dollar gold piece, which he turns over and over absorbedly and lovingly. He thrusts it quickly back as* Joe *reappears with a small snare-trap in his hand, which he begins mending with some catgut from his pocket.*] You mus' 'ave had ver' gloomy tam down here, wile I been gone so long. Jus' you

an' Klayquah, all alone. Can't you tell me 'bout it, pardner?

TOMBSTONE [*flatly*]: Don't matter.

JOE: Wat don' matter?

TOMBSTONE: Nothin' matters.

JOE: Wy you talk lak dat?

TOMBSTONE: Becuz it's true. [*Pause.*] I ain't no good nohow. . . . Nothin's no good.

JOE: Dat's foolish. Lots of fine teeng in dis worl' . . . right here in Yukon too. . . . Spring break-up come so soon. . . . Dat mek me seeng . . . mek me burn all over. Dese tam of year, after de long cole weenter, I feel someteeng bus' up in me, jus' lak de reever. Seem lak I die to spik to some one . . . even you, you dam ol' Tombstone. [*He leans back, laughing with hearty abandon.* TOMBSTONE *watches him as some uncomprehended thing.*] Wat mek you look so strange, garçon? Ain' you nevaire heard noboddy laugh before? W'y you don' laugh yourselv lak odder people?

TOMBSTONE: Jes' fergot how. Ain't never been a heap to laugh about, I reckon. [*Silently.*] She used to laugh . . . before. . . .

[*He stops abruptly, while* JOE *waits poised.*]

JOE: Oui, oui, go on. [*Earnestly*]. I wait for hear you, Tombstone.

TOMBSTONE [*piteously*]: Can't, Joe . . . not jes' now. . . . Don't make me, will ye?

[*He seems bereft of speech, in some surging pain.*]

JOE [*ignoring the awkwardness*]: Eh bien, we teach you how to laugh, mon brave. De Yukon, she lak people wat can laugh out beeg an' hearty. I wan'

you understan' her ways, eef you mus' leeve here.
TOMBSTONE [*dully*]: Live here. I can't do that. . . . You don't know. . . . There's somethin'. . . .
JOE: Purty cole all right, wen one has leeved in southlan'.
TOMBSTONE: 'Tain't the cold.
JOE: Wal, den, wat ees it?
TOMBSTONE: It's so awful still an' quiet. Makes me think too much, I reckon. [*He shivers.*] Jes' can't quit thinkin', somehow, 'bout things I'd ought to be fergettin'.
JOE: Wal, dat's wat I tole you. You shut teengs up too much eenside you. You mus' talk plentie . . . to ol' Joe . . . Klayquah . . . ennyboddy. Look at me . . . I seeng, I dance . . . I cuff de dogs . . . I swear at Klayquah. . . . Dat's fine beezness . . . Yukon, she's lak odder teengs. . . . You wan' get better of her, you mus' laff at her, lak Joe do. [*The click of the jackknife is the only sound in the stillness.*] You didn' lak de nordern lights las' weenter, wen dey play at night tam. . . . Nordern lights, I teenk she's purty. She's Yukon candle light . . . beeg candle way back of de clouds, wat de nort' win' alwuz try for blow out . . . an' don' quite mek it.
TOMBSTONE [*eerily*]: Dead things walk when them lights play. . . . I seen 'em . . . while you's gone away for trappin'. . . .
JOE [*astonished*]: Wal, dat's ver' strange. [*He puzzles silently.*] You 'fraid about someteeng, garçon?
TOMBSTONE: No, not a bit. [*Pause.*] Wolves wuz howlin' every night up in the hills while you wuz gone.

JOE: Oh, wal, you musn' min' leetle teeng lak dat. Dat's Yukon orchestra. . . . You're dead shot, pardner. . . . Wy you don' shoot dem?

TOMBSTONE: Got a fox or two. The wolves wuz alwuz gone, jest when I went to sight 'em.

JOE: I'm s'prize dat real live wolf would get away w'en you're behin' de rifle. You shoot lak nateeve . . . an' dat's strange teeng for wite man . . . Klayquah, 'e should 'ave got dose wolve'. . . . I weesh you two cud lak each odder better, an' talk leetle bit for comp'ny wile I'm gone away.

TOMBSTONE [*vaguely*]: Down south . . . down south . . . white folks don't mix with colored people . . . folks wat's skins ain't white like theirs is. . . .

JOE [*warmly*]: Pouf! Dat's more foolish. Klayquah, e's dam good camarade, no matter if his skin is red or wite. . . . Down sout'? . . . Dat's Louisian'?

TOMBSTONE: No. Not thar. [*His eyes are somberly fixed on the shadowy hills.*] Whar I wuz raised thar wuz blue hills . . . not like these 'uns . . . . 'Twan't Loosiany. . . . [*Suspiciously*] Don't matter, do it?

JOE [*amiably*]: Oh, non. I wuz goin' ask more 'bout were you come from. But now perhaps you say you jus' blow in on sout' win' . . . or fall down wit de snow storm. [*He laughs.*]

TOMBSTONE [*expanding a bit*]: Hain't much snow whar I wuz raised. . . . Cotton, jes' like snow . . . 'simmons . . . lots of 'em . . . 'possums in th' trees. [*A silence.*] 'Tain't them things that makes ye hanker. . . . It's folks what matter. [*He bursts*

out suddenly.] I got to git back thar . . . right now, I tell ye . . . I got to go, I tell ye.

[*He starts up, trembling with excitement, the knife dropping from his hand and the sticks scattering wildly.*]

JOE [*soothingly*]: Dar, garçon! You no can start dese meenute . . . not teel we fin' out leetle w'ere you goin'. . . . You got dose headack lak you use to 'ave las' weenter?

TOMBSTONE: I'm all right. Headaches ain't nothin'. . . . Don't matter nohow. No one keers 'bout me. . . . W'y should they?

JOE [*awkwardly*]: Wat mek you talk so foolish, pardner? Dese long mont' we leeve togedder, seem jus' lak you wuz my own garçon. . . . I could almost be your fader. [TOMBSTONE *laughs suddenly, a jangling peal like tuneless bells.* JOE *looks up, startled.*] Dat's no teeng to laff at.

[*He too lapses into moody silence.*]

TOMBSTONE [*looking miserably at* JOE]: You ben good to me. Folks ain't never been so good to me. [*His face is twisted and his voice choking, so that he cannot speak; then he bursts out fiercely.*] But I don't want to keer fer no one. They jest lambast ye. They wring yer heart an' guts an' make ye. . . .

[*He gives a short hard laugh and does not finish the sentence.*]

JOE [*amazed, makes a quick turn toward him.* TOMBSTONE, *with a sudden quiver, shrinks into a defensive heap*]: Don' be 'fraid, garçon. You alwuz ac' lak some one goin' for beat you. I would not hurt you.

[*The trapper knits his brows. puzzled.*]

JOE [*slowly*]: You 'ave hard feelin's to some one. . . . Some one been ver' bad to you, an' you 'ave hatred . . . ver' deep hatred for dat person. Ees dat so, Tombstone?

[TOMBSTONE *nods his head.*]

JOE [*persuasively*]: You no can tell ol' Joe about eet, garçon?

TOMBSTONE [*makes a negative gesture, resting his head painfully in his hand; then, abruptly*]: Did yore ol' man lambast ye, ever . . . lick ye, I mean . . . yore father?

JOE [*puzzled*]: Non. 'E wuz good man, mon père. . . . W'y you ask me, garçon? [TOMBSTONE *has again lapsed into tense silence. As though blocked.*] Sometam you tell me all about it, garçon?

[*The youth again nods silently.*]

TOMBSTONE [*explosively*]: I'll show them yet. . . . When I get money. . . .

[*He stops abruptly, biting his lips as though he had betrayed himself in some way.*]

JOE: So! Now I touch de spring for door to open. Ever'boddy's crazy 'bout de same teeng. . . . Money. . . . Dirty dollars. . . . You, too, Tombstone! [TOMBSTONE *has lapsed into his earlier sullen silence. His lips are tightly closed.*] H'm! Froze up . . . all solid! . . . By gar, I lak for know some nam' to call you. Tombstone! Dat's dam fool nam'. I lak for know wedder you Pierre or Jean or Weelyum. Weelyum! Dat's nice nam' for call you. How you lak dat? [*No answer.*] An' wedder de handle of de nam's she's Smeeth or Bobinette . . . or wat your fader . . .

[*There is a sudden blaze in the somber eyes*

which gives the effect of an explosion of powder. TOMBSTONE *springs to his feet.*]

TOMBSTONE: Ain't got no name, I tell ye. [*Stamping.*] Let me be, I tell ye. . . . I'll run away . . . I'll. . . .

[*He grasps his head, throwing himself passionately down on the steps, forehead in arms, with a choking cry that is like a sob.*]

JOE [*gently*]: Dar, pardner. Ol' Joe he's clumsy. I weel not bodder you no longer. Only it is not good for brood too much . . . mebbe 'bout teengs w'at nevaire happen. [*His face is tired. He puts out his hand as though to touch the youth's shoulder; then draws it back, remembering his former rebuff. Rising, he shakes himself like a big dog.*] Wal, look lak I entertain myself. Spreengtam in Yukon. By gar, she's too fine tam for pull long faces. [*He fetches an accordeon from behind the cabin door, and trolls out an old traditional French-Canadian chanson, with the lilt and click of oars in its refrain. He seems absorbed in the joy of the performance, though the drawling tones of the accordeon take on mournful echoes in the brooding stillness, and even his voice struggles consciously against the impingement of solitude.* TOMBSTONE'S *convulsed face gradually becomes quiet. Sings.*]

Mais quand on pure des chanquiers
Mes chers amis tous le cœur gai,
Pour aller voir tous nos parents,
Mes chers amis, le cœur content.
Envoyons d'l'avant, nos gens.
Envoyons d'l'avant.

[JOE *rolls out the other stanzas heartily.** *He slides over into a lusty jig tune, patting his foot vigorously, with many shouts and interjections*: "Dance your partners" . . . Chassez all"! *There is an air of peace and gayety about the little cabin.* TOMBSTONE *forgets to whittle, and looks up at* JOE *with a tortured affection.* JOE'S *booming laugh is good to hear, and he has lost his weary frown.* TOMBSTONE *is almost cheerful.*]

JOE [*throwing down the accordeon with a final shout*]: Voilà! Well, pardner, you feel better? Den we're gon' have beeg talk, jus' you an' me. . . . You're gon' tell ol' Joe wat happen wile 'e's gon' away.

TOMBSTONE: Nothin' much to tell. Klayquah, he wuz off scoutin' mos' the time. Says he got clear down to White Horse Rapids. Had big yarns to tell 'bout folks thar buildin' boats, ready to start off down the river. . . . Hull swarms of 'em. Jes' Injun lies, I reckon. Ain't no folks up in this country. . . . I kep' on with the sluice-box, like you tole me.

JOE [*slowly*]: Klayquah, 'e nevaire lie. . . . I wondaire. . . .

[*He muses.*]

TOMBSTONE: Ye got a neighbor.

JOE [*sitting up abruptly*]: Neighbor. W'ere?

TOMBSTONE: Down thar.

[*He points at some distant smoke.*]

* See "French-Canadian Folk Songs," selected and translated by J. Murray Gibbon. E. P. Dutton Co., New York.

JOE: Wat anybodie doin' way out 'ere in dese wile place?

TOMBSTONE: Prospectin'. . . . Old timer, looks like. . . . Thought he'd find somethin', but didn't.

JOE: So! Den 'e's leavin'?

TOMBSTONE: No . . . Wants to buy yer claim fer tradin' pos' er somethin'. . . . [JOE *has risen abruptly, a look of sharp apprehension in his eyes.*] Joe, yer goin' ter sell out, ain't ye?

JOE: Sell out. . . . Mon Dieu. . . . For why? Non. Non.

TOMBSTONE [*sits silently with a hunted expression. At last he bursts out*]: Ye said we'd leave here . . . soon. He'll give ye money . . . lots of it. He showed me heaps o' these here.

[*He takes the gold piece from his pocket and exhibits it eagerly.*]

JOE [*slowly*]: So dat wat come at las' . . . to Yukon.

[*He seems quite lost in his thoughts. It is* TOMBSTONE *now who breaks the silence.*]

TOMBSTONE [*insistently*]: Ye said ye'd like to git away . . . down south . . . where ye don't have to do no trappin'. Why don't ye sell out when ye got a chance . . . out o' this rotten country? [*Wildly.*] I can't stay nohow . . . I got to go, I tell ye.

JOE: Dar! Don' you be worry. How you lak I mek you pardner on dese leetle claim, eh, garçon?

TOMBSTONE: Ain't nothin' here. Peters tole me, spell ago. Yer keepin' me to help ye with the sluice-box. I hate it all. You jes' can't understand. . . . I got to go, I tell ye.

[*He has risen and is pacing up and down, almost sobbing with excitement and chagrin.*]

JOE [*earnestly*]: It's you wat do not understan', my fren'. . . . Leesten, I 'ave nevaire tol' you. . . .

[*He bends close, as though to draw something from his pocket, when a shadow looms between them and the sun.* KLAYQUAH *has appeared, as silently as a leaf drops from the tree. He holds up his hand in salutation.*]

KLAYQUAH: Nika chahko! . . . White man come. . . . Build fire . . . yahwa! [*He points at a curling tuft of smoke, downstream.*] Klayquah go for see.

JOE [*rapidly*]: Oui! I know. Dat's good. Now mush . . . hyak! Men' sluicebox underneat' de trees, w'ere deep snow 'ave smash her down. Crick she's runnin' leetle now. Ice gon' out. We start shovel nex' week meb-be. Den come spreeng-sluicin' . . . toute suite. . . . You see?

KLAYQUAH [*nods slowly; then points beyond the hills*]: Down river . . . hiyu Boston man, he come . . . mamook canim. . . . Like snow his tents . . . find hiyu gold . . . sahhallee chuck . . . hiyu white man . . . hyak . . . hyak!

[*As he looks at* JOE, *he sees the reflection of his own underlying dread. His eyes rest broodingly upon the distant hills, while his face again becomes stolid.*]

JOE [*nodding*]: Oui! Soon de wolves fight each odder for de gol'. . . . De Yukon, she's no more de lan' of silence. [*None of the three men speak, though the expression of each is quite different.*

TOMBSTONE's *eyes are shining. His hands are working restlessly. Recovering himself, and pointing to the sluicebox.*] Hyak, Klayquah! I come, before too long, for help you. [KLAYQUAH, *with a long, intent look at* TOMBSTONE, *stalks silently in the direction of the creek. With a swing to where the youth is restlessly pacing.*] Voilà! Someteeng you mus' know now, my fren'. . . . [*He draws a buckskin pouch from his pocket, and pours a stream of yellow nuggets into the palm of his hand.*] See! Dese from no-count Porc-Epines. . . . All dese fine gold. An' Joe Belyea, 'e fin' her!

[*He continues to pour.* TOMBSTONE *utters only confused inarticulate sounds. He stands with eyes riveted on the nuggets, with the look of a hungry animal within sight of food. He quite misses the almost exalted face of* JOE.]

TOMBSTONE [*holding out his hand impulsively*]: Lord. Shinin' . . . shinin'! . . . [*Doubtfully.*] It's real gold, ain't it?

JOE [*pouring a share into the youth's hands*]: Oui! De mos' real gol' dere is. Jus' lak she wash down from de hill w'ere she lay tousan' year. No man's han' have touch her. . . . No blood is spill upon her . . . lak dirty dollaire wat I get from trappin'. Dese, le bon Dieu himself 'ave scatter. Dere ees no curse upon her. She's ver' reech claim, dese Porc-Epines. . . . Wat you teenk now, eh, pardner?

TOMBSTONE: Never seen so much before . . . so shinin' . . . shinin'. . . . [*He fingers the nuggets lovingly, turning them over and over, and scraping the edge dubiously with his nails. His look is in-*

tense, almost radiant.] This 'ud take ye a long way from here. [*His hands close on the bits of gold as he turns swiftly to* JOE.] But we could leave here quicker . . . git more money right away if ye'd sell out. Guy below here said he'd give ye lots o' money right down in yer hand. He had a great big pile o' twenties . . . with eagles on 'em like the mint had stamped 'em . . . shinin', too. He give me this one, jest to look at.

[*He heaps the nuggets swiftly back into* JOE'S *hand, and pulling the twenty-dollar gold-piece from his pocket, holds it before the older man's eyes.*]

JOE [*diffidently*]: You don' understan'. It is not money wat I wan' . . . not jus' lak dat. I mek good leeving. Non! It is—wal, I don' know jus' how to tell you. It's finding someteeng. . . . Dat long search t'ru lonesome hills an' reever . . . an' den to run across de teeng you hunt so long . . . someteeng nobodie ever fin' before . . . me, Joe Belyea, to fin' heem!

[*His bronzed face is moved by the still passion that sends men out into far places.*]

TOMBSTONE [*looks dully at him, pain flooding back into his face. After a long pause*]: Gold's jest money . . . to take ye somewhere . . . to git ye out o' here.

JOE [*eagerly*]: No, pardner. Dat's jus' w'ere you mek meestake. [*He opens his palm to let the light strike the dull metal.*] Some gol' . . . wal, she's not gol' no more . . . de gol' you fin' yourself. She's . . . wal . . . [*He scratches his beard thoughtfully, unable quite to express the wordless*

feeling within him.] She's pull' you out from house an' home . . . t'ru fores' . . . over hill . . . t'ru danger, death. . . . You 'ave no peace until you fin' her. [TOMBSTONE *has lapsed into his earlier silence. Rapidly.*] Dat's wy I wan' to wash her from de groun' wit my own han's. I mek you pardner. We feenish it right now . . . before de Yukon wat I love she's spoil by people. . . . Spreengtam! De ice break up. We 'ave spreeng sluicing. Den we go away to strange far countrie were we peeck punkins from de trees . . . an' fin' beeg roses bloomin' all year roun'.

[*He laughs with a deep booming voice.*]

TOMBSTONE [*drawing back with a sharp intake of breath*]: It's you don't understand. . . . There's some one . . . I got to go right now, I tell ye. [*He clenches his fist, and seems on the verge of a collapse.*] God, if I could only tell ye. . . .

JOE [*affectionately, laying a hand on the youth's arm*]: Wal, tell Joe now, garçon . . . dese meenute.

[*There is the slight crunching of a step around the corner of the house.* JOE *hastily crams the poke of dust into his pocket, as the huge bulk of a man appears, limping slightly. He has a non-communicative eye, and is clad in rough miner's clothing. The two take each other's measure shrewdly, in the swift fashion of the frontier.*]

PETERS: I'm lookin' roun' fer Joe Belyea.

JOE [*smiling*]: The same, m'sieu. And you?

PETERS [*spitting politely*]: Peters my name.

Limpy Jim's the handle. Never heard much else these ten years I ben knockin' round the Yukon.

JOE: Oh wal, neecknam' she's good enough. Names git wore away up here. I'm sourdough, too. Came up from Montreal wen no one ain' here hardly.

PETERS: Yeah, I know. Heard about ye when I run a roadhouse way down below here on the river. Been outside a year or two. Nothin' seemed jest right down there, an' so I hit the trail again. I'm ear-marked now. Can't live nowhere else, it seems like. Been prospectin' these last two years. Got a grubstake outa McIlvain of Hudson's Bay this spring. Worse dam fool job I ever struck. Dam hard graft, an' nothin' doin'.

JOE [*politely*]: No?

PETERS: How'd you find it?

JOE: Oh, so-so.

PETERS: That's better'n me. Bin workin' up an' down this crick about a week . . . ever sence she softened up enough to pan a little. Got 'bout gold enough to fill a tooth so fur.

JOE: Wal, dat's too bad you work so hard for nothin'.

PETERS: McIlvain, he met a gol-durned fool down in the States what thought there's gold up in this country. Gold, yer foot! . . . Pie-eyed, he musta been, or stewed, fer certain. Helluva notion!

JOE: Oh, oui.

PETERS: This walnut sed he'd lived here till he froze a foot an' had to go outside to find a hospital. Batty mebbe. . . . Folks git batty livin' here too steady.

JOE [*smiling*]: Some folks, pardner.

[Tombstone *has again humped himself down on the steps, silent as a graven image.*]

Peters [*eyeing things sharply*]: What yer goin' ter use that sluicebox fer now, think ye? Washin' sheep?

Joe: Oh, oui! Pole cats, more likely. I lak for play aroun' wen I get tired of trappin'. Keeps my min' busy.

Peters: Some one tole me you wuz all fed up with trappin'. Sed ye wanted to go outside an' live a spell.

Joe: Oh, oui. We all get notions now an' then. Sometam I teenk I lak for see de worl'.

Peters: Don't blame ye. Ever'boddie needs a change. . . . Queer things outside these days. Don't use horses much no more . . . cars that run along on wires instid. People ridin' wheels aroun' . . . damdest monkeyshines ye ever saw. Hell, the noise an' whistles! Too dam many people millin' roun' fer me. Noboddy knows ye. I beat it back here, suddin'. Does a man a heap o' good ter git away, though . . . any one who's been here's long's you have. [*Carelessly.*] How'd ye like to sell yer holdin'?

Joe [*as carelessly*]: I ain' sellin'. Merci beaucoup.

Peters: Hudson Bay's awantin' ter git hold o' some likely spots fer tradin' posts. Better clean up while ye kin, an' git yer trip down to the States right now . . . this summer . . . [*with a lifting eyebrow*] unless ye got more claim than I could find along this consarned crick. I'm here to make an offer.

[Tombstone's *eyes are glued tensely on* Joe's *face, awaiting his answer.*]

JOE: I guess I stay jus' a leetle longer in de Yukon.
PETERS: Hudson' Bay's a big consarn. Can't beat their money. They give me leave to offer ye a handful. [*He pulls out a roll of gold pieces.*] Big stack o' money fer a place like this . . . a million miles from nowhere. 'Tain't like ye'd made a strike er somethin'.

[*He looks at* JOE *keenly as he plays with the gold pieces in his hand.*]

TOMBSTONE [*breathlessly*]: Yer goin' ter take it, ain't ye?
PETERS [*turning to him appraisingly*]: Right, kiddo. Ye got a eye fer bizness.
TOMBSTONE [*sullenly*]: Ye don't know nothin' 'bout me. I don't keer nothin' 'tall 'bout bizness.
PETERS [*to* JOE, *impressively*]: Well, pardner, here's yer chance ter clean up purty.
JOE [*calmly, with a shrewd twinkle in his eye*]: M'sieu Petaire, you are mos' good-hearted person. Dat verrie good of you to bodder wit' such no-count claim. Put back dose great beeg cartwheel in your pocket. I teenk you fin' much better claim. I 'ave strange fancy for dese no-count claim myselve . . . ezspechully as eet ees not money wat I wan' so much . . . jus' now. But someteeng I could not tell you 'bout. I no sell out now—not to noboddie.
PETERS: Ye mean that, final?
JOE: Oui. Final. I no weesh to talk about eet. [*He rises, to end the interview.* TOMBSTONE *drops his knife and laughs—the same harsh, jangling laugh as before. The two men stare at him mutually in the strained silence. With decision.*] Wal, eef you excuse me, fren', I go help Klayquah

leetle wile. Tombstone, geeve me dose riffle you jus' mak. I nail dem in. We jus' play roun' wit' sluicebox here for keep ol' Satan out of job. [*He laughs goodnaturedly.*] Bon jour, m'sieu.

[TOMBSTONE *hands over the bits of wood dumbly, and sits crouched in a wordless heap.* JOE *goes leisurely over to the clump of trees, right, where* KLAYQUAH *is working.*]

PETERS [*after studying the youth for a time, laughs shortly*]: Well, there goes yer chance ter git out o' the Yukon, walkin' right away from ye. Ye said ye had ter git away . . . immegit. . . . [TOMBSTONE's *face is a study in tense despair.*] Dam Canuck! Dam high an' mighty! Think he'd staked the earth instid o' this lousy piece o' crick here. Porcypine. . . . Yer buttons! Thinks he's got me stumped, I reckon. [*He sits with knit brows for a time.*] Any one above ye on the crick here, Gloomy?

TOMBSTONE: No. No one ever comes here . . . ever. . . .

PETERS: Claims below here ain't no good 'thout water rights. . . . Not that it's no good nohow . . . dam big fizzle.

TOMBSTONE: 'Tis good. Ye lie. He showed me lots o' nuggets. Everybody lies, I reckon.

PETERS [*his eyes narrowing*]: Struck it! Christ, I thought so. [*Pause.*] Nuggets, hey? Whatcha mean, nuggets?

TOMBSTONE: Hunks o' gold, outo' the crick.

PETERS: Nuggets! Crimey! So ye fell fer that old frame-up. Them shiners' easy 'nough to fake when ye know how. Yer dead right, pardner.

Ever'body lies, I reckon. He's framin' ye to git some help in diggin' with his sluicebox fer the summer. Help ain't none too plenty in the Yukon. No one ever comes here. Ye jest said it.

TOMBSTONE [*shortly*]: Shut yer lyin' face. He said he'd make me pardner.

PETERS: Kid, yer easy. Swallowed all that guff. O Lordy!

[*He laughs so uproariously that* TOMBSTONE'S *nervous fingers close convulsively on the jackknife. He drops it again.*]

TOMBSTONE: Quit, I tell ye! Quit yer laughin' . . . My head hurts . . . awful. . . .

[*He buries his head in his arms and rocks back and forth.*]

PETERS [*appraisingly*]: Country's gettin' on yer nerves, I reckon. It does with some. Hits the cheechakos hard, first winter. [*Pause.*] I wuz only tryin' to help ye. Ye said ye had ter git away . . . immegit. Well, Joe's clamped ye here fer good . . . nailed ye right down to his sluicebox with yer riffles. I've heard 'bout Joe Belyea. He's the most hidebound sourdough in the country. He'll never leave here.

TOMBSTONE [*savagely*]: Quit talkin' to me. He jest got through sayin' he'd take me with him . . . sometime. . . .

[*He crumples, half sobbing, as he realizes the insecurity and indefiniteness of this promise.*]

PETERS: Sometime! Easy mark, I call ye, Gloomy. Swallow everything they tell ye. Ever swallow anybody's lies before, kid . . . jest to git ye to do somethin'? [TOMBSTONE'S *face becomes duskily*

pale; his eyes seem to flicker like dull guttering candles. PETERS *regards him curiously in the aching silence. Turning on his heel.*] Well, pardner, don't say I didn't try to help ye git away, when ye're frettin' here next winter . . . an' the next one after that one. Dunno the reasons fer yer actin's . . . but I got mine, all righto. Comp'ny sent me here to git this place . . . regardless. An' jumpin' claims ain't none too healthy in this country. [*He paces about restlessly, his eyes on the prisoning hills. A bird of prey is dropping in narrowing circles on the hills across the way.*] Some one's lost a dog, I reckon. Buzzard's spotted him, off yonder. [*Restlessly.*] Rotten country! Not a livin' soul fer miles an' miles, I betcha. Lonesome's hell. Reg'lar graveyard. [*He continues the restless pacing, watching the bird's swooping flight. Turning suddenly to* TOMBSTONE.] Why don't ye pop that carrion up yonder? Bet ye twenty ye can't hit him on the fly. Yer a dead shot, Gloomy. Bet ye can't pop him. [*He hands the long rifle down to* TOMBSTONE.] Somethin's got to happen round here. Lay ye forty ye can't drop that buzzard while he's flyin'. [*As he carelessly flips the gold pieces in his hand, he is amazed at the gleam that flares up in the dull eyes.* TOMBSTONE *seizes the rifle and rises, swaying a bit and rubbing his hand across his brow. Regarding the clumsy figure before him with a new interest.*] Somethin's eatin' ye, all right. . . . Ye look wore out, an' wild like. Crazy 'bout money, ain't ye? Left some one outside ye keer fer, mebbe. Them's the ones that's restless in here. Th' others like ter drop clear outa all their harness. . . . Well,

Joe's clamped ye, proper. I see ye shovelin' dirt ten years from now, instid o' leavin'. Plannin' ter start sluicin', ain't he?

TOMBSTONE [*makes a quick turn toward him, half raising the rifle*]: Get out, dam ye. Yes lyin' now yerself. Ye know it.

PETERS: Don't ye pop me. That won't help ye none to git away. [*With the sudden flare of an idea, as he sees* JOE'S *blue shirt bobbing here and there beneath the trees, as he turns to the youth, significantly.*] Say, kid, listen. I know what will, though. [*A swift thumb indicates the bobbing blue shirt.*] I'll give ye money . . . all ye want, right now . . . all I said I'd give him fer the claim . . . if ye pop that buzzard thar . . . a little low. No one'll ever know. They can't find out how it happened. An' we'll light out . . . right now . . . down to the States. I'll see the Injun don't talk none. . . . Men drop out easy in the Yukon. I know old Joe. He'll keep ye here until yer bones is moldy in this rat-hole of a country. Ye can't git past him. [*Bending close.*] Pop that buzzard . . . down low, Gloomy.

[*The two stand wide-eyed, gazing fascinated at each other.* TOMBSTONE *stares like a famished man in sight of food as* PETERS *draws out a roll of shining gold pieces and holds them out to him. He gasps with a dry throat, as he looks uncertainly at the broad blue back, and draws his hand across his head as though confused. His eyes, as though drawn by a magnet, return to the gold. His hand, almost instinctively, reaches out for the*

rifle, and he sways as though drunken. He lifts the rifle; then puts it down, with an inarticulate sound, half a cry of pain. Then with a swift fury, he raises the gun and aims it at JOE. *But he gives a sudden lurch as he pulls the trigger, and as the gun goes off, throws it down with a sobbing cry, and runs in the direction of the trapper.*

As the shot rings out, JOE, *who has turned in the direction of the two, is seen to fall like a tree plunging to a valley.* KLAYQUAH *reaches him almost instantly.* PETERS *watches the scene with a detached air, a bitter smile on his lips as* KLAYQUAH *and* TOMBSTONE *carry* JOE *carefully toward the house and lay him down near the steps. There is no motion of the still figure.* KLAYQUAH, *after gently folding the limp hands, rises, and with a look of deep hatred at* TOMBSTONE, *reaches out for the rifle, which he reloads quickly.*]

TOMBSTONE [*in agonized collapse, oblivious of everything but the rigid face of* JOE]: I've killed him! . . . God, I've killed him! . . . I never meant to. Somethin' busted in my head, jest when I went to pull the trigger . . . I knew I couldn't, even when ye told me to. . . . I've hit him anyway, I've killed him!

[*He lays his head on his arm and rocks back and forth, his body rent by deep sobs.*]

PETERS [*strolling up, his hand on his revolver as he watches* KLAYQUAH]: Least said soonest mended,

youngster. He treated ye dam rotten, I'll say, Gloomy.

TOMBSTONE: Git away from me. I'll choke ye. Ye made me do it. [*Looking down at* JOE.] I ain't no good. I've killed him. . . . I see it now. My heart's bad an' cruel. . . . Everything's gone black an' empty. [*He swings toward* PETERS.] It's you I ought to kill, not him . . . ye snake, ye. . . .

PETERS [*backing fearfully away from the strange gleam in the waif's eye*]: Look out there, Gloomy. I'll put a hole through you in half a minute. . . . Yer off yer trolley.

[*He is prevented from lifting the revolver by an answering movement from the watchful figure of* KLAYQUAH, *just across from* JOE'S *body.* PETERS *stands at attention.*]

TOMBSTONE [*confusedly, his voice shrill with anguish as he faces* PETERS]: Somethin's busted in my head. It's burnin' . . . burnin'. . . . Snow won't stop afallin' . . . snowin' . . . snowin' everywhere. There's them eyes I seen all winter . . . lookin' at me through the winder. . . . Dad, don't hit me. . . . Oh, God, to hate yer father. . . . [*He crouches into a crushed heap, sobbing; then rises again with eyes wide and staring.*] Ye can't hit her, I tell ye . . . I won't let 'em beat ye . . . I'll quit the gang, I tell ye . . .

[*His voice is harsh with pain, and he seems to be talking to some one directly before him.*]

PETERS [*shaking him roughly*]: Quit yer yellin', kid. I ain't yer father. . . . Yer off yer trolley.

Yer ol' man musta licked the sense right out o' ye. . . . Yer nutty. . . .

TOMBSTONE [*dully, looking at the body before him*]: She's dead, I tell ye . . . I was goin' back to find her. . . . I never got to see her. . . . Mother! [*He draws a confused hand across his eyes.*] It's Joe. . . . He's dead. . . . Guess they're all dead but me. . . . I ain't no good . . . I never meant to kill him. . . .

JOE [*during the last speech, sits up quickly, to the amazement of* PETERS, *who turns to run, to find himself covered by* KLAYQUAH's *steady rifle.*] Wal, garçon, you didn'. [*He rises with a swift bound toward* PETERS.] Hands up, poltroon . . . dirty coward! T'row your gun down, pronto! . . . Tie him, Klayquah . . . hard an' fas', by gar. Dirty fox! De possum fool you dis tam. T'ought I fin' wat devil's game you play roun' here. I guess I know for certain. . . . Mek dat knot all solid, Klayquah.

[*While* KLAYQUAH *is tying* PETERS' *hands securely behind his back with the thongs from the porch, first tossing aside the revolver,* JOE *turns solicitously toward* TOMBSTONE, *who, after a gasp of bewilderment at* JOE's *rise, has sunk again into a sullen, wordless heap. He gives a slow, dry laugh as he looks at* JOE.]

TOMBSTONE: God, ye ain't alive! . . . so many shadders 'round here . . . dead things walkin'. . . .

JOE [*bending over the crouching figure*]: Dar, garçon . . . you nevaire min'. . . . We get you all

feex up . . . all fine . . . ver' soon. . . . You're all wore out.

TOMBSTONE [*convulsively*]: I ain't no good. . . . You ben good to me . . . I tried to kill you. . . .

JOE [*quickly*]: Dar, dat's beeg fool joke. . . . You're scare for someteeng I don' know. People been ver' bad to you. Some one hurt you, fearful . . . Yukon, she's scare you, too, meb-be. . . . You nevaire min', garçon. . . . You tell ol' Joe 'bout ev'ryteeng . . . we feex you up all fine an' purty. . . . You leave here verrie soon . . . we go an' peeck dose punkins from de trees down in dose gran' blue hills, wit' possums sittin' all aroun' . . . jes' so soon we get spreeng sluicin' done. [PETERS *at this gives a dry, mirthless cackle, at which* TOMBSTONE *winces as though he had been struck with a lash; then echoes with the same tuneless jangle of laughter; laughing as though he could not stop, and finally ending in a choking sob. Wheeling on* PETERS.] I could keel you now . . . wid my own han'. . . . [*His face is white with fury, and* PETERS *shrinks from the blaze in the steady eyes. To* KLAYQUAH.] Run him down to Fortymile . . . dose boys down dere know how to deal wid scoundrel. Keep de gun right in hees back. Say to dem dat Joe Belyea will come ver' soon for tell dem all 'bout ev'ryteeng. . . . Jus' now . . . [*He turns solicitously to* TOMBSTONE *and leads him to the corner of the porch, where the youth sinks into a crouching heap.*] I mus' stay here. . . . Dar, garçon . . . you jus' keep quiet leetle wile.

PETERS [*insinuatingly*]: Well, so long, pardner. . . . See you later mebbe. . . .

[*He starts off with a snarl as he feels the pressure of the gun in his back.*]

Joe: Dirtie skunk! I ought for keel you now . . . wid my own han'. . . . [*He controls his rage as he looks at the shrinking figure before him.*] Dey feex you plentie, down at Fortymile! Here, eet ees too fine day for keel someboddie. Wat you teenk, eh, Tombstone? [*There is no response. Silence seems to have resumed its sway, as the dusk creeps dully down upon the hills. The snow now looks like gray shadows, and the figures of* Klayquah *and* Peters *are almost indistinct as they fade into the distance.* Joe *turns to watch them safely out of sight, with a final wave of the hand to* Klayquah, *who trots off, pressing the gun into the back of the limping figure before him. Cheerily.*] Now, garçon, we go eenside cabane . . . mek warm fire . . . get nice beeg supper. [*He turns to the silent figure, which has sagged strangely to the earth, so that it seems part of the enveloping silence.*] Mon Dieu, garçon . . . you look so wite . . . an' still. . . . Pardner, jus' say wan word to Joe . . . ol' Joe, he's care for you . . . he's gon' look out for you . . . you tell heem now 'bout ev'ryteeng. [*He is dragging gently at the shoulder.*] Garçon . . . you worry 'cause you try for shoot ol' Joe? . . . Dat's not'ing. . . . Dat's beeg fool joke. You wan' for leave de Yukon? . . . Wal, den we go toute suite . . . we feex it for you somehow . . . Klayquah, he take you down reevaire jus' so soon as he get back . . . so you can see somebody. Garçon . . . oh, bon Dieu . . . wat you been doin' now. . . . Dieu merci! [*With unutterable sadness in his eyes, he*

raises the jackknife, which has fallen to the ground from the inert hand, as the sagging form sinks flatly to the earth. Blood drips from the point. JOE'S *face is gray with anguish and pity. With a sob.*] Garçon . . . wat mek you ac' . . . so . . . foolish? . . . [*He sinks down over the still form to feel the pulse, and then to his knees, hiding his face in his hands a moment before he makes the sign of the cross. Rising slowly.*] Noboddy ever know wat grief is buried wid you, garçon. [*There is a long pause as the dusk creeps down upon the two.*] Jes' Klayquah now . . . jes' lak before . . . an' all dat quietness again. . . . Bon Dieu, she's lon'some dese tam. . . . [*The gaunt form of the sluicebox looms across his gaze, like a threatening, ominous creature as he stands, a still figure of isolation. Brokenly.*] Dese tam, I ain' got much heart for start spring sluicing. . . .

[*The shadows are deep on the brooding hills and in the eyes of the trapper.*]

CURTAIN

ZOMBI

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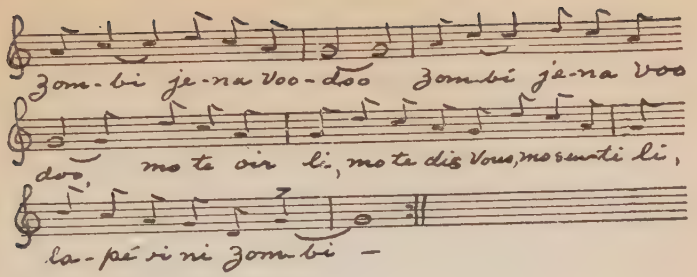

Words and Music by Harold Levy

ZOMBI

by

NATALIE VIVIAN SCOTT

CHARACTERS

MARIE LEVEAU, young Quadroon girl, known as the Voodoo Queen
MAMMY, an old colored woman, her mother
BUCK, a young Negro
M'SO HENRI, a young Creole beau
NEGRO MEN AND WOMEN

TIME: *The second quarter of the past century.*
PLACE: *The front room of a small house on the edge of the swamps near New Orleans.*

SCENE: *A fire is burning in a small, rough chimney-place in the corner. There are low stools and blocks of wood around, with various utensils containing the viscera of chickens. On the walls are nailed knots of horsehair, feathers of turkeys and buzzards, dried snake-skins, rabbits' feet, and other charms. A large cage made of four strong*

uprights stands on the floor at the back. Before it is spread a square of gaily colored rug on which are laid out numbers of knotted strings, crude wax figures, finger bones of children, mounds of meal, bunches of gaily colored feathers. A heap of dead chickens is piled directly in front of the cage. Before the curtain rises, there is a primitive music of stringed instruments and drums, a hushed ecstatic moaning through which sounds a voice chanting a Voodoo song, at first loud, then sinking to a low wail:

Zombi there is a voodoo
Zombi there is a voodoo
I see you here
I say to you
I feel you near
You've come, you're here
Zombi . . . . . !!

In the dim light are seen the prostrate forms of Negro men and women, some half nude, moaning and writhing. Others, ranged about the walls, are bent over crude musical instruments which they are playing in a sort of delirium. On the cage singing, stands MARIE LEVEAU, *a young woman with slender figure voluptuously rounded; black hair, rippling and unkempt, drawn back from a face that is a thin oval, pure in outline, with sharply-defined features, and skin the color of raw old mahogany;*

she has large dark eyes, elongated and a trifle scornful, a high narrow forehead—in all a face almost ascetic but for the pouting swell of the red lips, and a slight distension of the nostrils. She is scantily draped in a bright-colored cotton scarf, and she sways in her place in a slow frenzy of muscular contortions.

As the song ends, she stands taut, her head back, fists clenched, in an ecstasy. The others creep out, fearfully, except her mother, a wizened colored woman, prostrate on the floor. MARIE *retains her pose for a moment after the last departure, then she half opens her eyes, and surveys the room. Finding it empty, she relaxes abruptly.*

MARIE: G'on, Mammy, get up. They's gone. [*As the old woman continues her moaning chant unheeding.*] Get up, I tell yo'. Quit that foolin'. They ain't nobody by to give you mind. Leave that fool snake be.

MAMMY [*casting fearful glances at the cage*]: Marie, chère, don' you talk dat way. Tek care, fer Gawd's sake, he ha'm yo'.

MARIE: Mammy, how many time I tole yo' I don' hol' wit' all dat foolishness? W'at yo' think I do those monkeyshine fer? Yo' think that old snake got any sense? Pah! It's me got the sense ter mek those fool nigger give me all they money fer doin' foolishness fer 'em. Voodoo! Spells! They good spells fer Marie. Buy her new dress, new tignon, hein? Tha's w'at fer those snake is good, Mammy.

An' those chicken! It's shame ter was'e 'em all; be so good fricassee, wit' little garlic and sweet peppers, and got to was'e 'em on ol' snake, to get those fool nigger' money. Tha's the Grand Zombi, hein? MAMMY [*throws herself at* MARIE'S *legs, which she clutches, beating her with a feeble fist*]: Ferme to bouch', t'entends? Zut, bon Dieu! You bad girl! You wan' kill us bofe? He gwine gi' us de yaller fever, or dose pox, my-Gawd-my-Gawd-my-Gawd! Gran' Zombi, don' you lissen!

MARIE: Listen all you want, Gran' Zombi, you. Lemme go, Mammy; lemme go. I wan' to take some o' Gran' Zombi's chicken, make us a good fricassee; gombo maybe. We need it mo' than Gran' Zombi.

MAMMY [*screaming, then moaning*]: Hush dat, I tell yo'. He gwine strike yo' dead, en me wid yo'. Don't you lissen to her, Gran' Zombi. It ain' her fault, no. It's her pa wid his sco'nful ways. It's dat teachin' he gin her. Oh, my Gawd, he ain' skeered de debble hisself, en she des lak him.

MARIE: Yas, Gran' Zombi, it's my pa. My gran' pa, so fine and all. He promise to mek the lil' pickaninny into a lady, 'cause she look lak his ma. He mek her a lady, yas! Go ma'y hisself to two-t'ree plantation an' he don' know we is no mo'. You got to be my pa, Gran' Zombi, ha-ha-ha! Gi' me plenty money fer new dresses, and gold chain, hein? I don' sing you no songs, lak Mammy learn in Jamaica: I pinch yo' tail, ha-ha-ha! Da's w'at I do!

MAMMY: Yo' kill me, Marie, yo' kill me! He gwine kill us bofe! It ain' me, Gran' Zombi, it ain' me! It's her, it's her, it's her, said it!

MARIE [*laughing lightly*]: Yas, it's me, Gran' Zombi. [*Picking up knife of sacrifice.*] Yo' be good, er I kill yo' firs'. They got plen'y mo' Gran' Zombi in de woods w'ere yo' come f'om. [*She brandishes the dagger lightly before the cage, while the old woman rocks, inarticulate with fear.* MARIE *holds the knife high, as though to strike: her eyes focus on the snake, and laughter leaves them. Her look is enigmatic. With a sudden movement, she throws the dagger down, and shrugs.*] I go fix that gombo, hein?

[*A low knock sounds.* MARIE *falls to the floor beside her mother, rocking to and fro with trance-like gaze.* BUCK *enters cautiously. He is a tall burly Negro. He looks at* MARIE *fearfully and takes only one step into the room. He waits while* MARIE, *her eyes half-closed, chants a Voodoo song.*]

BUCK [*in hushed voice*]: Marie! Honey! Cain't yo' come outen yo' trance yet? Dat spell stay on you too long, you get yo'self a was'ein' fever, lak dat old woman out on Bayou des Allemands. She ain' never come out o' it, en she pass, jes' lak dat, still a-moanin', en a-foamin', en her eyes rollin'. [*Anxiously.*] Marie! Yo' heah me?

MARIE [*looking about her as though with difficulty*]: Ya-as, Gran' Zombi. Ya-as. Who dat speak to me? Yo', Buck? W'at you come back here fer, callin' me outa my spell? Gran' Zombi talkin' to me tellin' me things I wan' to know. An' you come breakin' in, breakin' it up. W'at you mean, comin' in lak dat? Yo' got no fear o' the Gran' Zombi?

BUCK: Yo' know I is, Marie, yo' know I is. Don' take on lak dat, honey.

MARIE: W'at yo' come here fer, then, w'at yo' come here fer, an' break in on the talk o' the Gran' Zombi, lak he nothin' more nor you is? He goin' get yo' fo' that. He gonna put a spell on yo' cotton, an' yo' mule gonna die, yo' so proud on.

BUCK [*flinching*]: Don' let him do dat, Marie, honey. Don' let him do dat. Yo' know dey ain' nuthin' could 'a drawed me back hyah 'ceptin' a sight o' you, honey. Ain' nigger in de crowd 'ud come back hyah de evenin' o' a spell dance.

MARIE: I know de Gran' Zombi gonna lay yo' low, breakin' in on his talk lak yo' done.

BUCK: Don' let him get mad wid me, honey: yo' tell him. Yo' tell how 'tis.

MARIE: It ain' no study o' mine. Yo' fix it up wid him yo' own self. I got to go get some stovewood. [*She picks up carcasses of chicken, gives sidelong glance at her mother, and says*]: Stovewood, hein, Mammy?

[*Exit laughing.* MAMMY *crumples to the floor again.*]

MAMMY [*rousing herself*]: Why 'ont yo' come in and tek a chair? Dey's mo' res' in settin', w'en standin' ain' bringin' no money.

BUCK: Yas'm, da's right. Da's sho right. But ain' no use rilin' de Gran' Zombi. Marie say he mad wid me. Him mad, bes' stay wha'h I is.

MAMMY: Reckon mebbe da's right.

BUCK: Yeah. Bes' stay wha'h I is, Mammy. I ain' skeered o' no niggers: I kill plenny o' 'em hyah an' dah, you knows dat; but things dat come at yo', ez

yo' cain' see neider hyah, das diff'ent. De Gran' Zombi, he diff'ent. Ain' lak ernudder nigger: de Gran' Zombi lak Mi'so A'istide, on'y mo' so. I fools wid mah own kin' an' mah kin' wid me. I stan' wha'h I is, ef he mad wid me.

MAMMY [*with cautious glance at the cage*]: Look lak he don' hyah yo' nohow. He cain' be so mad: he sleepin' lak a baby. Howcome yo' stay so late lak dis? Yo' allus tells Marie yo' gotta go back so pow'ful early. Yo' come on yo' mule?

BUCK: No, ma'am. Dey got a gang o' us down by de bridge on de bayou. Mi'so A'istide got us fixin' de bridge. He say high watah comin' en it ain' so strong lak it oughta be. We all come off fer de spell-dance. I reckon dey back by now. But I come ter see Marie. Mammy, yo' got ter tell me,—w'at's come ter Marie?

MAMMY: How yo' mean, Buck? Ain' nuthin' come ter Marie.

BUCK: Looka hyah, Mammy. I ain' hyah fer no foolin'. Yo' knows w'at I means. But yo' don' know all I means. Marie bin hyah to-day, dah to-mo'ow, since she bawn. She come to me lak a bird w'en we's chilluns; n'en she go to Gran' Coteau to school, w'en she come back, she cain' see me no mo'. Well en good. Da's de white in her, en' I stan' back. She do de white ladies' hair fer 'em, an' she ac' lak 'em. She wear high-heel shoes lak 'em, an' she grin' 'em into me wit' her sco'nful ways. An' I stan' back, an' I'se glad w'en Mi'so A'istide tek me to Pointe Coupée, so I don' see Marie. An' come I get dah, I crazy fer de sight o'her, wid her laughin', an' her meanness, an' her yaller face. I stay dah fer

two grindin's, an' w'en I come back hyah, w'at I fin'? Is I come fer Marie, w'en I crazy fer her?

MAMMY: No, Buck, no, Buck. She sont me. I gone fuh yo' myself. But don't tek on so, Buck. Be steady in yo' ways, Buck. De steady pirogue stay right side up,—'member dat.

BUCK: I ain' takin' on, Mammy. Leastways, I ain' yet. But I got to fin' somep'n'. She come for me, she did. She sont you. She flung herself at me, you seen it, yo' own self. No mo' sco'nful ways. She ain' w'ite girl no mo',—she nigger wit' de bes', an' pas' de bes'. Bress Gawd, dey ain' none lak her, her wild ways, an' her lubbin' lak de debble hisself.

MAMMY [*mildly*]: She sho' set sto' by yo'.

BUCK: Sto' by me? Sto' by me? An' w'at about me fuh her? W'en I come back an' fin' her tooken up wid Gran' Zombi, an' de odder niggers skeered o' her, skeered to come nigh her. Her pretty face, an' her fine ways, her projeckin', an' callin',—an' still dey don' come nigh her, 'count o' Gran' Zombi. I come, ain' I? I skeered ez dey is o' Gran' Zombi, but I walk wid de debble hisself, come Marie on de yuther side o' him.

MAMMY: I seed dat. I knowed dat. Yo' got a heart in yo' lak a bull, Buck, bravin' de Gran' Zombi lak dat.

BUCK: I got a heart in me, an' I got it still, and lak a bull it is. It's a-roarin' now, an' it's a-rippin', an' w'at's mo', it ain' nevah gonna be still, tell I fin' w'at I come fer. W'at's come ter Marie?

MAMMY: I don' know w'at yo' sayin', Buck. W'at's come ter Marie?

BUCK: Yo' knows w'at I's sayin', Mammy, good ez I does. W'at's come ter Marie? She put me off

an' she flout me, an' she don' see me no mo'. Can yo' say corntrary to dat, Mammy?

MAMMY: Naw, dat I cain'. Fo' Gawd, Buck, I cain'. An' I cain' say howcome.

BUCK [*glaring down at her as she sinks to the floor*]: Yo' cain't, cain't yo', Mammy? Yo' cain't? Yas, yo' could, ef yo' would. An' ef yo' won't, I'll do it fo' yo'. It's 'cuz M'so Henri back f'om Pa'is. Das howcome it is. She think I ain' know how it bin wid 'em befo', an' he take her up, an' he fling her down. I wasn' dah, den. Buck wasn' dah. But I'se hyah now. I pick her up wha'h he fling her. I pick her up, an' I gonna keep her, ef I got to grab that lyin' little snake neck o' hers in my hands.

MAMMY [*wailing*]: Yo' skeer me, Buck. Don' take on lak dat. Yo' know yo' ain' gonna get nowha'h wid Marie by takin' on.

BUCK [*calming himself*]: Yas, I gonna go easy wid her at de firs'. An' ef she don' say somep'n' sof' to me, ef she don' come to me lak she did . . . [*He gives an ugly laugh.*] But I goin' easy at de firs'.

[*He goes back and leans against the doorpost, rubbing his big hands.* MARIE *comes in. She glances at him indifferently.*]

MARIE: You still hyah? Yo' better clear out. Gran' Zombi mad wit' yo'.

BUCK: Look hyah, honey: hyah's fo' bits. Fo' bits Mi'so A'istide gi' me fer drivin' him dis evenin'. Yo' give dat to Gran' Zombi, hein?

MARIE: Tha's all Mi'so A'istide gi' yo'? Tha's all he gives yo'?

BUCK: G'wan, Marie: yo' ha'd on M'so A'istide. He ain' got so much money lak he useter.

He have a free han' in de ole days. High watah an' áll ain' take all Mi'so A'istide got, he got so much. Dey's quality an' quality dey stays, an' dey got mo' money'n mos' anybody 'roun' dese parts,—till M'so Henri go to Pa'is, an' fling it all away.

MARIE: M'so Henri! M'so Henri, hein? W'at yo' know 'bout M'so Henri an' flingin' money, hein?

BUCK: Yo' ast me 'bout M'so A'istide an' I tell yo' why he gin' me fo' bits an' no mo' lak he useter w'en I drive him. W'at yo' takin' on so fo'? Useter be, I could 'a said a heap mo'n dat, an' yo' ain' take on. Ev'ything I say dem days soun' mighty sweet to yo'. Now I cain' say nuthin' right, look like. W'at fo' yo' treat yo' Buck lak dat, honey?

MARIE: My Buck! My Buck! Mighty fine Buck, come breakin' in jes' w'en Gran' Zombi tell me how I goin' fin' money to buy me new year-bobs. Tha's how he's my Buck.

BUCK: Looka hyah, Marie. I gonna gi' yo' new year-bobs my own self jes' soon ez I gets my crops in. But w'at yo' allus takin' on agains' Buck fo', honey? I come back to git yo', Marie, dis evenin'. I goin' crazy, Marie. I ain' got no res' in me. Yo' treat me so sco'nful. I tell you I comin' to get yo': an' I come, an' yo' ain' dah. How come yo' treat me lak dat? Dey's playin', an' dey's playin'. But I ain' goin' to put up wid all dis foolin' no longer, Marie: yo' hyah me?

MARIE: Yas, I hyah yo'. An' now yo' hyah me, Buck. I done wit' foolin', too. Jes' 'cause I play wit' yo, an' make somep'n' over yo', yo' think you gonna boss me, an' gi' me orders? Yo' think you gonna boss me, Buck? Well, you ain'. Yo' ain'

gonna boss Marie Leveau. Yo' can study that, Buck. An' get out lak you come in, on'y mo' quick.

BUCK: Yo' bin playin' wid me, huh? Yo' was playin' wid me, w'en yo' sont fo' me dat fus' time, an' yo' took me in de big woods, an' you love' me lak yo' learn' f'om de debble hisself? Yo' playin' wid me, w'en yo' make me sen' word to Mi'so A'istide I'se sick, so I kin frolic wid you all de day? Yo' playin' wid me w'en you make me sell de bes' one dem mule M'so A'istide gi' me, to buy yo' a dress? An' w'en yo' take all de money I save to he'p mah ole mammy hole her place, w'en she ailin', an' it eat her heart out to sell it? Yo' playin', huh? Yas, yo' playin'. An' yo' wan' me to tell yo' why?

MARIE [*tauntingly*]: Yas, yo' tell me, 'cause I don' know. Me 'n' Gran' Zombi, we don' know. You tell us, hein?

BUCK [*slowly and calmly*]: Yas, I tell yo'. Yo' pick me up, 'cause M'so Henri tired o' playin' wid yo'. He drop yo', an' go to France. An' now he home, yo' studyin' to catch him back, so he kin drop yo' again. Ain' das so, Marie?

MARIE: That soun' pretty good, Buck; on'y two-t'ree thing wrong. M'so Henri, he quit me, yas. He go to France, yas. But he come back to ma'y me, that's w'at for he come back.

BUCK [*stares at her a moment then laughs mockingly*]: Pah, yo' ain' know w'at ev'ybody know. Yo' ain' know M'so Henri gonna ma'y Mamzelle Véronique de St. Amant? Yo' ain' know dat!

MARIE [*rushing at him and pounding at his chest*]: It's a lie, it's a lie, it's a lie! He's comin' hyah tonight to see me. Yo' see how yo' lie?

BUCK [*smiling satisfaction*]: It's a lie, huh? It's a lie? Dey get ma'ied come Xmas, an' Phrosine been totin' bo'quet to her ev'y day f'om M'so Henri.

MARIE: It's a lie! It's all a lie! An' if it 'twas true, I'm done wit' yo', Buck. I'm done wit' yo'. Yo' get out o' hyah quick. He goin' to ma'y me.

BUCK: Get out, huh? He gonna ma'y you, huh? I ma'y you ernudder way. [*He seizes her by the throat, bending her back.* MAMMY *screams.* MARIE *catches up the knife and stabs at* BUCK. *He catches her wrist and crushes it till the knife falls, then says slowly*]: Naw, I ain't gonna kill yo', Marie. Yo' too pretty. Yo' done wid me, huh? Well, I ain' done wid you.

[*He flings her from him and strides out.* MARIE *rubs her wrist resentfully. Then, she laughs contemptuously, relapsing into smoldering sullenness.*]

MAMMY: Yo' better pay min', Marie, honey. Yo' got ter rile somep'n', leave de rattlesnake be. Yo' rile Buck to-night. He ain' one to be rile'.

MARIE: Buck! Pah! Mammy, Buck won't ha'm me. Buck couldn't ha'm me.

MAMMY: Couldn't ha'm yo'? Wouldn't ha'm yo'? Yo' blin'. Buck's a man to go his way, an' de big swamp and de deep river won' stop him. Why fo' he cain' ha'm yo'?

MARIE: Why? Why, Mammy? 'Cause he crazy mad about me. That's why. An' again 'cause he skeered o' me, clean skeered to death o' me an' Gran' Zombi. [*With sudden fury.*] Puttin' his lyin' tongue on M'so Henri!

MAMMY: Yo' blin', Marie. Yo' ain' nevah been blin'

lak dat befo'. Buck's a strong man, an' he go to he ends, ain' nuthin' stop him. He sta't on a rampage, he go clean to he en', he go clean th'ough his skeeredness an' clean th'ough his lovin' to w'at he aim at. Marie, I'se skeered fo' yo', honey.

MARIE: Min' fo' yo'self, Mammy: I ain' studyin'. Not studyin' 'bout Buck, nohow.

MAMMY: I'se skeered fo' yo', honey. I'se skeered fo' yo' ev'y way. Yo' count so much on M'so Henri.

MARIE: Don' yo' name him, Mammy. I know M'so Henri, ain' I? Ain' I know him? Ain' he tole me w'en he leave he come back? Ain' he tole me? Ain' he come? Ain' he comin'?

MAMMY: Yas, honey; yas, honey. But yo' was ca'yin' on might' tuhble dat evenin': maybe he outtalk hisself in some things tryin' to ca'm yo'.

MARIE: Ferme to bouche, t'entends?

[*She strides threateningly to* MAMMY, *then shrugs and flings from the room. A knock.* MAMMY *opens the door.* HENRI *enters. He has black hair and eyes, is tall, lean-faced and elegant, with an easy smile and an assurance that is slightly contemptuous. He taps* MAMMY *on the shoulder with condescending affection.*]

HENRI: Eh, la vielle! Comment va, hein?

MAMMY [*taking his hat and placing a chair ceremoniously*]: Mo pas bien, M'so Henri. Comment vous yé?

HENRI [*laughing*]: Comment vous yé! On my word, it's good to hear gombo again. I'd clean forgot it. I'm excellent, Mammy, the best. But what can trouble you, that you are pas bien?

MAMMY: I bin had de slow fevah, M'so Henri, 'bout plantin' time, suh, an' look lak it don' wan' leave me. Das how 'tis, suh: sickness come on a hoss, an' go 'way on foot, suh.

HENRI: That's right, Mammy, it does. But you are good for a long while yet, I hope. How is Marie?

MAMMY: Comme-çi, comme-ça, M'so Henri.

HENRI: Ah, you are as indefinite as a diplomat, Mammy. She still holds with these Voodoo tricks, I see. I do not like that. Is she more settled? Calmer?

MAMMY: Nah, suh, I cain' say she is, suh. Nah, suh, it's de yuther way 'roun', suh. She take on a heap. Go easy wid her, M'so Henri, suh. Go easy wid her, please, suh: it take a quiet han' on a wil' hoss, suh. Please go easy wid her, suh, an' it bes' fo' ev'ybody.

HENRI: I shall, Mammy: be sure of it. But where is Marie?

[The door is flung open and MARIE *stands there, in a white gown with the tight bodice and billowy skirt of the period, which gives a purity to the lines of her face, at the same time accentuating her coloring. She has a white rose in her hair. She speaks carefully.]*

MARIE: Me voici! You keep me waiting, M'so Henri.

HENRI [*with a show of gallantry, somewhat ironically*]: Mademoiselle! [*He looks at her with half-unwilling admiration.*] You are exquisite, truly, a picture for a court. And where did you find so charming a costume, Mademoiselle?

MARIE [*with a pout only half playful*]: You ask

your question from so far, M'so Henri: I cannot hear you.

HENRI: You witch! As full of tricks as ever. [*He crushes her impetuously in his arms; but instantly releases her, steps back and stands away.*] How is that? Is that better?

MARIE [*moving swiftly to him, presses her head passionately against his breast*]: Ah, M'so Henri. This is good. This is good. You have been so long, so long.

HENRI: A whole year, Marie.

MARIE: A whole year since you have kissed Marie. And still we live.

HENRI: Live, and look well. Even look radiant and lovely. That proves you do very well without me, since you look so well and happy when I have been gone for a year.

MARIE: It is because you have come back. Ah, kiss me, M'so Henri, a long kiss, a good kiss. You love me? You have missed me?

HENRI: Can any one who has known you not miss you? It is like silence after trumpets.

MARIE: Ah, and for me. For me. I have ached for you, M'so Henri. It has hurt me like a pain. Kiss me, M'so Henri. [*He kisses her violently. Ecstatically.*] Nothing has changed!

HENRI [*laughing, with an effort*]: Your gown! That is a change, indeed! Stand there where I can see you. Gad, it's truly superb: one would swear that you were about to be a nun, Marie, but for your eyes and lips.

MARIE: It is for you. You have said I should wear

such a gown and I would look like a convent girl, as I was that little while.

HENRI: Yes, that little while, when I thought you were to be a saint, and only looked at you in the Chapel with such thoughts. Until you followed me that day at Gran' Coteau, in the trees, and I found you were a divine little sinner, instead. I was wrong, Marie: you should not wear white. It is lovely, but it is not you. You are a scarlet trumpet vine, a nun of the order of Gran' Zombi.

MARIE: What you like, so I am always with you, M'so Henri.

HENRI: Always? That is long. You say it without thinking.

MARIE: You have said it to me.

HENRI: It is so easy to say, that one says it. As you have.

MARIE [*looking down at him, tensely*]: And when we are married?

HENRI: Married? Marie, you know the law does not allow it.

MARIE: So it does not, here. So it would not when you left. But you said it. You swore it. You swore it before the Gran' Zombi. You can take me to France, as you said. As you swore, M'so Henri.

HENRI: Marie, a moment! Listen to me calmly. To-night I have come here to talk freely to you. And you must be calm. It was by your wildness that you have made me say things I did not mean, trying to calm you.

MARIE: What is it that you did not mean? You did not mean you loved me?

HENRI: That kind of love, the kind you give. You

have been wonderful. Look. For my thanks, I have brought this from London for you. [*He holds out a finely embroidered silk bag, and takes from it a gold chain, showing at the same time a roll of bank-notes in the bag. He puts the chain on her neck.*] I came to bring you this to-night.

MARIE [*tosses the bag on the floor*]: And w'at do you bring me wit' it? You bring your love wit' it? You bring yourself wit' it? No. You don't answer me. I see. I know. I tell you. You bring this to hol' my eyes while you steal away an' ma'y Mamzelle Véronique. I don't look at it. I don't wan' it. I look at you. I wan' you, M'so Henri.

HENRI: Some one has told you—. You have heard—. Ah, well, you had to know.

MARIE: It cannot be, M'so Henri. Tell me it is not true.

HENRI: Yes, it is true, Marie: I am to be married.

MARIE: Oh, M'so Henri, you kill me. An' you stan' there, like that! You goin' to be married?—Well, it got to be. Something tole me inside that it was not for me. But you come back to me jus' the same, M'so Henri? You come back just like you did? W'at I care, marry or not marry? You come back to me, M'so Henri?

HENRI: Marie, I wish you did not care at all. Jove, I feel like a brute. I thought you would have forgotten me. No, I must not come back. I care, too, more than you would believe, more than I knew. You have meant much to me. But it must end now.

MARIE: Have meant much to you? I mean nothing to you now, then? You were cold to me, when you kiss' me as you have?

HENRI: No, no, no, Marie. You mean much to me still: you will always. But we must part. I shall remember you always.

MARIE: It is a long time! You 'ave said that word before. . . . You cannot go, M'so Henri. Look at me. Kiss me.

HENRI [*clasps her for a moment, then puts her from him*]: No, Marie, I must not. I must not, and I will not. I have been too weak already. It is not to be. Never again.

MARIE: Don' say it! Don' say it! Never again! It got to be! It mus' be. You promise' me. . . .

HENRI: You made me promise, Marie! I shouldn't have. And you knew it was impossible.

MARIE: You tell me that now? Me, who been waitin' fo' you, an' dressin' fo' you, an' livin' fo' you? You wanna leave, an nevah come back? Nevah see me no mo'? No, no, no. You have say-ed you love me always. I gonna hol' you wid my two arms aroun' yo' neck. I gonna hol' yo' so yo' cain' go. I will not let you go. I, I, I, Marie Leveau, I will not let you. I hol' you lak this wit' my two arms, lak you say, always, always. An' I know w'at it mean' w'en I say it. You cain' go, you cain' go, you cain' go! [*He strides to the door, dragging her with him. She falls, clinging to his legs. As he goes through the door, she rises and runs after him screaming.*] No, no, no, no, no!

[*He reënters, carrying her in his arms; he puts her into a chair, disengaging her clinging hands.*]

HENRI [*harshly*]: This is too much, Marie. The workmen at the bridge will think I am beating you.

You've got to be quiet. I regret it all deeply, but it has to be. Good-by. [*He goes out.*]

MARIE [*screaming*]: Take yo' regrets! Take yo'self. Go, go, go! I gi' yo' my regrets: take them, too. I gi' yo' more, more, more! I gi' yo' curses, an' spells, an' evil eye! [*Looks around in helpless rage.*] Gran' Zombi, curse him. Don' let him go to her. Strike him dead, you Gran' Zombi. [*Beside herself, she starts gathering the cords and feathers, takes up one of the small images, muttering.*] M'so Henri, M'so Henri, M'so Henri. [*Thrusting at it with a pin, as she does so, then twisting a cord about it, muttering feverishly, and screaming at intervals.*] It mus' be, hein? It mus' be, M'so Henri.

[MAMMY *comes out cautiously. She takes the silk bag and examines its contents, watching* MARIE *furtively; then hides it in her apron.*]

MAMMY [*gently*]: W'at yo' doin', Marie?

MARIE [*flings the charm in the direction taken by* HENRI]: Foolishness! All foolishness! A spell to strike him dead befo' he reach her. W'y don' yo' make it work, yo', yo' Gran' Zombi? [*Strides up and down*]. Ha-ha-ha! Yo' wo'k fo' de odders, no wo'k fo' me. He leave me! He flout me! He fling me away!

[*She tears the rose from her hair, and the chain from her neck. Meanwhile, a murmuring is heard outside, swelling louder. A group of Negroes enter, carrying the limp form of* HENRI. *All are excited, talking at once in hushed, agitated tones. They lay him on the floor.* MARIE *looks, screams, and*

throws herself on the still form. Negroes bend over him, get water, loosen his collar. One feels his heart, and shakes his head. The voices are hushed.]

ONE NEGRO: Ain' no use: he dead a'ready.

[*Excited murmurs:* "My Gawd!" "Lawd save us!" "Bress Jesus!" "Lawda-mussy!" "Amen."]

[*Then, through a continued chorus of exclamations and moanings*]:

1ST NEGRO: Fell clean th'ough. Someun put de light in de wrong place.

2ND NEGRO: Look lak he got hit on de head.

3RD NEGRO: Mus' be wh'ah he hit w'en he fall.

1ST NEGRO: Look lak he had a spell on him.

2ND NEGRO: Sho' look lak he had a spell on him.

[*They begin to look at* MARIE LEVEAU. *She catches their words, and raises her head, suddenly quiet. She looks around in bewilderment, and her eyes fix on the cage of the snake, which she regards with horror, and fascination, and growing awe. She looks down at* M'SO HENRI, *slowly draws away from him; then, in a quick, writhing movement, she turns toward the cage, and says, in a clear, low, even voice*]:

MARIE: Gran' Zombi! Devil!

[*She remains, kneeling, with eyes fixed on the cage. The face of* BUCK *appears at the window.*]

CURTAIN

THE PORTRAIT OF TIERO

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THE PORTRAIT OF TIERO

by

Zoë Akins

CHARACTERS

Sigolio, the Count of Urbino.
Cleofante, his wife.
Setoni, his cousin.
Francesca di Genova, a cousin to Cleofante.
Tiero di Lannoy.
Guests, including Messer del Vasto, a critic; Messer Giovannino, a poet; and a Cardinal of the Church.
Servants.

Time: *A spring afternoon in the Sixteenth Century.*
Place: *A room in the Villa d'Urbini in the country.*

Scene: *Through great windows ajar at the rear, a terrace is visible, and beyond the gleaming balustrade one may see the sweep of cypress trees descending the long avenue to the gardens.*

With the exception of Messer Giovannino, *all the characters of the play are on the stage,—including the servants and the guests.* Roland, *a magnificent Major-domo, supervises his assistants as they go from*

person to person offering fruit and wine. Then the fruit is left in two baskets on a cabinet; and the servants presently withdraw. All the while there is a swift clamor of small talk.

CLEOFANTE *moves among the groups, slowly, indifferently, magnificently. She is perhaps between thirty and thirty-five years of age. Her manner and the attitude of the others toward her proclaim the greatness of her position and authority.*

The young girl, FRANCESCA DI GENOVA, *is also present. She is fair, shy, lovely, troubled—and, in the group, inconspicuous.*

SIGOLIO, *gray and withered, but with sharp, bright little eyes, occupies his great chair beside a table near the center of the room. He never for an instant hesitates to govern the conversation—deftly, turning it about the way he desires it to go, and always he is chuckling as if at some secret he keeps to himself. A silver flagon of wine and a glass stand on the table at his elbow. He drinks a great deal. He listens always to* CLEOFANTE *when she talks, stopping the conversation about him with a gesture to strain toward what she is saying. His attitude toward her is one of indulgent pride. Across the table from him, wearing the red of his Office, is a complacent Cardinal.*

SETONI, SIGOLIO'S *cousin, only a few years younger than the Count, moves among the guests with what one feels is a delicate dis-*

cretion. His face is fine and humorous, his bearing a little aloof. He has his secrets too—for all his simplicity and humor.

TIERO DI LANNOY *sits apart, on a marble settle. . . . A hound lies beside him on the seat, another lies on the floor, and he strokes their heads idly as he idly listens, as if not understanding and not caring, to the conversation that is waging. He is very young and very beautiful; dark, and rather sullen, except when he meets* CLEOFANTE'S *eyes, and then his face is radiant with a smile. For him no one else exists—in the room—or in the world.*

As TIERO *stares continually at* CLEOFANTE, *so* FRANCESCA *stares unhappily at* TIERO. *Out of the clamor of talk the conversation presently grows clear. A group surrounding* CLEOFANTE *is agreeing with one who is speaking.*

FIRST GUEST: Again I say it is a miracle!

THE OTHERS OF THE GROUP [*agreeing instantly*]: Yes . . . indeed, yes . . . I too, say. . . .

CLEOFANTE [*very distinctly*]: You are wrong. [SIGOLIO *holds out his hand against further words from the* CARDINAL, *who has been speaking and listens to* CLEOFANTE, *who continues.*] There are no miracles—

SIGOLO [*chuckling, and leaning toward the* CARDINAL]: You hear? My wife has no nervous attachment to a tradition, my lord; the Church has one

daughter who regards her with sophisticated eyes, eh?

[*He chuckles, proudly, and strains his ears as* CLEOFANTE *speaks again.*]

CLEOFANTE [*calling across the room to* SETONI]: Come, Setoni—and join forces with me!

[*The group about her tries to interrupt as* SETONI *advances.*]

SEVERAL GUESTS [*speaking at once*]: Madonna! But—! We say—

CLEOFANTE [*to* SETONI]: They would have it that my portrait of Tiero is a miracle, Setoni. Tell them, as I have told them, that there are no such miracles. One does not sit before the canvas and have one's hand guided by God!

[SIGOLIO *chuckles outright. Several of those listening smile. . . . But several are grave.* TIERO *is listening, but with a far-away look in his eyes as though he heard only the sound of something he loved.*]

DEL VASTO [*from the other side of the room, speaking with subtle intent*]: Art has her own miracles, Madonna—and often God has less to do with them than the devil. . . . But miracles they are. . . . And who knows how or why?

CLEOFANTE [*looking at him keenly as if she were answering more than he has said, and speaking very slowly so as to send her meaning clearly*]: Art may work miracles for others, Messer del Vasto, and you who have written so much of art and artists should know whereof you speak. But neither God nor the devil guided this hand when it painted the portrait of Tiero!

SIGOLIO [*to the* CARDINAL]: Always the portrait of Tiero! Do people talk of nothing else this spring, my lord?

THE CARDINAL: Indeed, Count, they talk of nothing so much. The critics marvel, and the painters envy. Your wife has immortality for a new jewel.

SIGOLIO [*chuckling, as he leans forward*]: One that I shall graciously permit her to wear although it has not come from the coffers of the Urbini.

[CLEOFANTE *has seated herself and glances casually toward* TIERO; *he, seeing her eyes on him, smiles radiantly across the room at her, and then leans forward, his face in his hands, as though to drain the sight of her . . .* SETONI *meanwhile is speaking.*]

SETONI [*to the group*]: My cousin Cleofante does not believe in inspiration. She shuns the false energy of all stimulants, even those of criticism and sympathy, when she sets herself to a task. What she does, she does alone—unencouraged, unadvised, unmoved. She has a man's broad and vital technique, and a man's ability for thinking straight and far. For years I have watched her work,—coldly, intelligently, solely with the power of her brain,—achieving effects that are in no way miracles, but are matters of technique and deliberation.

SIGOLIO [*who has been listening, and speaking involuntarily*]: I think she is different from any woman who lives.

CARDINAL [*leaning forward*]: Eh, Count—? I did not hear that.

SIGOLIO: No matter. [*He chuckles and listens.*]

THE FIRST GUEST [*to* CLEOFANTE *and* SIGOLIO]:

Then let me alter my praise, Madonna, only to the extent of saying that there is about this portrait something of the ecstasy and thrill of a miracle; but if Messer Setoni has explained you fairly, you are a greater artist, even, than we thought.

DEL VASTO [*from across the room where he stands beside a table eating grapes,—a challenge of irony in his voice*]: And if you continue to achieve such marvels of technique and deliberation, Madonna, Raphael himself must guard his laurels.

ANOTHER GUEST [*leaving* DEL VASTO *to join the group about* SETONI *and* CLEOFANTE]: I remember that Leonardo said to me years ago that when he painted a portrait, he—

[*He continues the story, but his voice grows lower as he joins the group to which he has been speaking. While they are listening,* SIGOLIO *gives up trying to hear, and pours out some wine for himself and the* CARDINAL. FRANCESCA *moves to where* TIERO *sits and stands near him, waiting to speak.*]

SIGOLIO [*to the* CARDINAL, *as he offers the wine*]: Degenerate days, my lord! Too much talk—altogether too much talk! Too much art—too much unrest! We are losing the great simplicities. [*He drinks and stops instantly as with a thought.*] What will the world be to-morrow? If there are many women like Cleofante—? [*He drinks, chuckling.*]

FRANCESCA [*to* TIERO, *timidly and yet desperately*]: Tiero—won't you go with me—into the garden—or out upon the terrace?

TIERO [*hard, and stubborn*]: No. No. . . .

[*Without another word* Francesca *hurries from the room unnoticed.*]

One Guest [*continuing his conversation*]: But it seems to me this portrait gives one a keener sensation of sheer enjoyment than any I have ever seen. It is more than a portrait—

Cleofante [*interrupting, pleased suddenly*]: Yes, yes, it *is* more than a portrait, is it not? I know that.

Sigolio: Do not forget, my friends, that my wife had for a model a singularly pleasing young man. Eh, Tiero? Eh, Cleofante? Much of the picture's success is due to that happy chance, is it not?

[Cleofante *rises, restless and chafing.*]

Cleofante [*shortly*]: That is possible.

[*Her eyes go to* Tiero *suddenly as if she hated him.* Sigolio *sees the look, and, as always, chuckles.*]

Another Guest: How much does the painter owe to his model, after all—?

Another [*interrupting*]: It depends often upon the relation between the painter and the model, says—

[Cleofante *stands in the open window, restless, impatient, while the others argue so rapidly that their words are lost.* Sigolio *watches her and leans closer to the* Cardinal, *indicating* Cleofante *with a motion of his hand.*]

Sigolio: The eternal woman, my lord! In spite of the big gift; my mention of Tiero was not tactful. She has taken him and used him, and now she does not want to admit the obligation. She does not want it remembered that another contributed to her suc-

cess. She resents, already, that the real Tiero was her collaborator. . . . The eternal woman!

DEL VASTO [*as* FRANCESCA *enters the room again, a small metal box held unobtrusively in the folds of her gown*]: Ah—for instance—here is the Lady Francesca! Messer Raphael has said that much of the glory of the Sistine Madonna is due to her loveliness.

[FRANCESCA *pauses, flushing.*]

SIGOLIO [*to the* CARDINAL]: You hear that? Give a woman the talent of ten men and he is still a bigger thing than she. Messer Raphael celebrates the beauty that inspired him. . . . My wife wishes to belittle the beauty to which she is so beholden. . . . Jealousy, my lord,—a woman's jealousy. . . . But could I love her were she less a woman? [*He rises and addresses the others deliberately and dryly.*] I do not know what degree of gratitude Messer Raphael owes to our cousin, Francesca, because she served him as a model for the Blessed Virgin—but I do know that my wife paints with the same ease and sureness of effect one model as another. Come, I will show you a drawing that she made only a few weeks ago of her devoted husband. [*His voice grows fine with irony.* CLEOFANTE *watches his face warily, —yet with a certain amusement, although she is a little doubtful of the significance of his remarks as he continues.*] I do not say that it is a pretty picture, but I say that it is done by the same hand, with the same *inspiration*—if you insist upon the word—as the portrait of Tiero, though I still maintain, my dear—[*to* CLEOFANTE] that many people are praising your latest work for a quality that does not be-

long to the artist and that *they* cannot go beyond—the beauty of our young friend, himself. . . . Will you come?

[*The group is ready to follow him.*]

Del Vasto: Assuredly, Count . . . but we were saying. . . .

Another: The beauty I, too, admit. . . . But it is the flaming *manner*, the splendid style of it, the unexpected tones and delicacies that, I say, give the portrait its vitality, its grace,—that make it somehow *seem* a miracle. . . .

Another [*under his breath to a friend*]: I have seen all her work. . . . It has distinction . . . but she has done nothing like this before.

His Friend: I agreed that she has gone beyond herself—far beyond. . . . They say—

[*His words sink in a whisper.*]

Sigolio: This way, my friends; Cleofante, you are coming too?

Cleofante: I am coming; but this drawing, my lord, of which you are so suddenly proud, is only a hurried sketch that . . .

[*She does not finish.*]

Sigolio [*definitely*]: It has pleased me. . . .

[*He leads the way gossiping with the* Cardinal *and offering his arm incidentally to* Francesca *as they pass her; she wavers, then takes it and goes out with them. The others follow, leaving* Cleofante *and* Setoni *speaking together, and* Tiero *dreaming on the marble settle.*]

Cleofante [*in a low voice to* Setoni]: Look at

him! The portrait is the nobler. The portrait is remarkable. He is not.

SETONI [*not sharing her attitude*]: But he has the passion, the vitality, the youth, and the dreams that drench your canvas and make it great.

[TIERO *leans over a dog and then turns suddenly from it to* CLEOFANTE *who catches her breath as he smiles.*]

CLEOFANTE: Look! I must paint him again—like that—!

[*Suddenly she moves to* TIERO *and placing her hand under his chin lifts his head and stares down into his eyes.* TIERO, *after a second of complete stillness draws a long, sighing breath, glances sharply at* SETONI, *who is watching, and rises suddenly, shaking away* CLEOFANTE'S *touch. Leaving her abruptly, he whistles to his dogs and goes out upon the terrace. There he leans against the balustrade,—his head flung back, the dying sunlight on his face. . . .* CLEOFANTE *stares at him, and then laughs a little uncertainly. . . .* SETONI *comes and touches her arm.*]

SETONI [*meditatively*]: Let us go and hear what the learned critics have to say regarding this drawing of your husband.

CLEOFANTE: They are all fools. . . . But my husband is no fool. . . . I like Sigolio. He knows that the drawing is not good. But I *will* paint a portrait of him—a portrait that will make them all wonder. . . . If only I could work again! My success has distracted me, depressed me, and left me uncer-

tain, and a little frightened. . . . Of course,—because I have done an extraordinary thing, these dilettanti who talk of art all day long, wish to imply that my achievement was a sort of accident. They would tear the credit away from me. . . . They whisper that there is some reason. . . . They would have it that I *love* Tiero. . . . [*She is speaking with calm irony, amused and cold: she pauses and then continues.*] People are so stupidly superstitious. They attribute the most ridiculous miracles to romance—especially the lesser breed of artists and critics. . . . You can understand that it seems odious to me to admit that Tiero has had any part in my success. . . . Sigolio is no fool. He knows what their tongues ache to say. . . . And he knows, too, how to vex me and mock me with the hint of a debt to Tiero. . . . Sigolio is very curious . . . I wonder what he really knows . . . ?

SETONI: He pretends more than he really knows about your work,—about all the arts,—about many things.

CLEOFANTE: But I have seen him pretend less than he really knows. . . .

SETONI [*musing*]: He likes your hard and brilliant surface. He is immensely proud because nothing penetrates or softens you.

CLEOFANTE [*suddenly looking toward* TIERO]: There is a great discrepancy between the portrait and Tiero. . . . Tiero is a vulgarian—

SETONI [*impatiently*]: Tiero! A vulgarian! You are playing with words, Cleofante.

CLEOFANTE: For once you are obtuse, and even obstinate, Setoni. . . . The portrait *is* the nobler.

Tiero has been too much loved. The liking that people have for him is as if some common and vulgar usage were made of him. One grows diseased through infection from minds that crowd too close. . . . People have left upon him a sort of stain, a breath,—how can one describe it . . . ?

SETONI: The portrait is not that of a vulgarian.

CLEOFANTE: No; I did not know him so well then. . . . It is far beyond a mere likeness of him. It is creative, Setoni. I wish that Tiero would go away. His presence vexes me so that I cannot work any more; the sight of him disturbs my contemplation of the picture. Let us go and look at it. Sometimes I cannot realize that it is the work of this hand—

[*They go out.* TIERO *now comes back, idly, into the room and then with sudden passion flings himself down on the marble bench, his face in his arms.* . . . FRANCESCA *returns.* . . . *She stands near him, speaking timidly.*]

FRANCESCA: Tiero—?

[TIERO *lifts his head; he answers a little wearily.*]

TIERO: Yes, Francesca?

[*She advances a step toward him and holds out the box she has been carrying.*]

FRANCESCA [*simply*]: Take them.

[TIERO *rises and looks curiously at the box she offers, but he does not understand. She places it on the table between them, and opens it while* TIERO *looks. As he sees, he cries out, hurt.*]

TIERO: No—!

FRANCESCA [*lifting a chain of jewels from the box and twining it about her fingers,—looking at it wistfully*]: I cannot keep them any longer. Let them find you another bride, Tiero.

[TIERO *turns from her and sits, his face in his hands. He is about to speak but can find no words.* FRANCESCA *looks at him compassionately.*]

FRANCESCA: I do not reproach you. Two months ago you came into this house hoping to love me whom you had seen but once before, because a marriage had been arranged for us. You hoped to love me, Tiero, —I know that.

TIERO [*suddenly*]: If you only knew with what eagerness I came, Francesca! What dreams I had!

FRANCESCA: I know with what eagerness I expected you,—and the dreams I had. . . . But you loved her instead. [TIERO *lifts his head as if to speak. She checks him, quickly, bitterly.*] Oh, I know! I know! [*She slides the jewels from her fingers back into the box and closes the lid heavily.*] There are your jewels, Tiero. Let them find you a bride who will be content with what you give her.

TIERO: Francesca—if only you were kind! If—only—

[*He cannot go on.*]

FRANCESCA [*suddenly coming and sitting by his side, and touching his clasped hands with hers*]: Oh, be wise! Go away and leave her! Do not stay in this house any longer. . . . Go home, Tiero! Cleofante is done with you now. The portrait is finished.

TIERO [*somberly*[: I hate the portrait.

FRANCESCA: I hate it too, for it gave you to her. But go home, now, Tiero. Say to your family that you no longer wish to marry me—or say that I have asked you to let the marriage wait a little; but go soon; Cleofante is different from other women. She—

TIERO: Why do you talk to me of her? It is useless.

FRANCESCA: I have known her a long time. I know her mercilessness, her vanity, her coldness. And I do not want you broken, Tiero,—like a reed in her hands. You will go—will you not?

TIERO: It is too late.

FRANCESCA [*after a pause*]: You love her so greatly, then? You will not leave her even though there is no happiness for you here? I have seen men sick and humble for her love, but she talks to them as one man to another. There is no love in her, Tiero, for any one. [*She rises and walks to the window and then comes back and stands beside the table, proudly humble as she pleads.*] You and I are young. We are like two children lost in an old forest. Or like two little boats overtaken by darkness on the waters. We are being sucked down—down—down—. Let us save ourselves if we can. Let us forget all that has happened here! Leave this house to-night—and take me with you—if—if there is any hope in your heart still,—if I might comfort you at all,—if even the least little dream remains. . . .

TIERO [*looking at her with sudden compassion and rising and taking her hands*]: Forgive me. I have failed you. I am sorry. . . .

FRANCESCA: Do not fail yourself,—your father's house.

TIERO: You do not understand. I have failed you and myself, too; but I cannot fail Cleofante—for she loves me, Francesca,—even as I love her.

FRANCESCA [*startled*]: Tiero! [*She clings to his hand, searching his eyes. . . . Then she flings his hand from her and sits down in* SIGOLIO'S *chair beside the table.*] No. . . . No. . . . You are dreaming! You are mad!

TIERO: Dreaming, or mad, or both—it is true. . . .

FRANCESCA: She has won you with words! She has told you she loved you; why,—God knows! Perhaps she does love you in her curious and inexorable fashion. But she will never give you herself. . . . She will starve you with words; Cleofante could give herself to no one.

TIERO: Even that has been, Francesca.

FRANCESCA [*after a pause*]: The forest has closed about us. There is no way through. The whirlpools are running in the darkness. . . . And we are being sucked down.

TIERO: Hush. . . . *I* am not afraid. I only wonder what is to happen. . . . But I wish you had not been so kind. [*He lifts one of her hands and kisses it; with the other she hides her tears, but he takes it from her eyes, holds it and kisses it too.*] Forgive me. . . .

[*Then he goes quickly out, pausing on the terrace to whistle to his hounds, which come at his call. He vaults the low balustrade, followed by the dogs, and disappears down the avenue.* FRANCESCA'S *sobs come bitterly.*

Then from a pocket of her dress she draws out a vial of poison, stares at it . . . and *decides. Half blinded by her tears she goes to the window for a last look at* TIERO. *She watches an instant, and then, lifting her head, is about to drink, when* CLEOFANTE *enters.* CLEOFANTE *and she face each other. . . .* FRANCESCA *slowly takes the vial from her lips.* CLEOFANTE *lays an arm about her shoulder and holds out her hand for the poison.* FRANCESCA, *at first, does not yield, but her hand is trembling so that she cannot hold the bottle which* CLEOFANTE *takes quietly. . . . A young man comes along the terrace and pauses, peering into the room.* FRANCESCA *moves away from the window.*]

CLEOFANTE [*with sudden pleasure as she recognizes him*]: Oh! . . . Messer Giovannino? When did you come, Poet, and what treasures do you bring?

[GIOVANNINO *advances into the room. He does not see* FRANCESCA, *who now sits cowering in* SIGOLIO'S *high-backed chair. He is a young-old man—magnificently dressed, insidious with words, and an egotist. He comes forward as he kisses* CLEOFANTE'S *hand.*]

GIOVANNINO: Salutations, my lady. . . . I kiss no hand that my verse has never celebrated; but yours—I kiss yours twice, first because of the admirable lines that I have written of it, and again because it has painted the portrait of Tiero di Lannoy. [*Holding her hand and staring down at it.*] Strange hand . . . so white . . . so soft . . . so strong . . . so gifted . . . ! A dove and a conqueror. . . . A little flower and

a god. . . ! A third time I salute your beautiful right hand, Madonna!

[*Again he kisses it.* CLEOFANTE *is pleased in spite of the obvious artifice of his praise.*]

CLEOFANTE: Have you written the sonnet about the portrait as you promised? Tell me that! If you have forgotten—

[*But* GIOVANNINO *flourishes the manuscript.*]

GIOVANNINNO: Behold! Will you hear it . . . ? The sestet is particularly good, and the first lines . . .

[*Reading.*]

"O vivid face! O haunting radiant face!
As a dark star might move across the day
And make the tide of golden sunlight gray . . ."

You see the idea is that of a black star—flaming and burning through the insipid daylight. . . . Extraordinary—is it not?

CLEOFANTE [*taking the sonnet and looking at it*]: I drink all praise of that picture thirstily, Giovannino. We must show this sonnet to Sigolio, and to Setoni.

GIOVANNINO [*with more sincerity than is his habit*]: The Count, Madonna, chooses to be gracious about my verses always,—because of course he is indifferent; but Messer Setoni is given to a great love of all the arts, and discusses seriously even the slightest of talents; and he has flattered me by sometimes showing himself difficult to please.

CLEOFANTE [*suddenly tiring of him*]: I have just left him discussing my portrait with an energetic young man from Rome who is writing a book on

modern painting and who argues all his points by quoting Titian, Muxiano, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Leonardo—and God knows who else! . . . And by the way, Sigolio is having a new wine brought up from the cellars—something he has got recently from an unheard-of monastery on some unheard-of island near Greece.

GIOVANNINO: Madonna! An unknown wine from an unknown island! Will you tell me where they are drinking it?

CLEOFANTE: In the west loggia,—you know the way—through the red gallery?

GIOVANNINO: I can find it, Madonna. A new wine! Ah!

[*He goes out with an affectation—not wholly affected—of eagerness.* CLEOFANTE *sees that he is gone, and finishes reading the sonnet; then she goes toward* FRANCESCA—*who has been bitterly resenting the idle conversation with* GIOVANNINO *at such a moment. Again* CLEOFANTE *holds the vial of poison to the light and stares at it; then she smells it; and then, speaks decisively.*]

CLEOFANTE: I know this poison well. The Blind Man makes it. It has no taste; it works slowly and insidiously. The first effect is a haze over the eyes; then he who has drunk begins to flush and tremble and his voice drops to a whisper; but there is no sickness, no agony, for a few moments,—not until he falls, when the pains take him. Then it is all over, for he dies immediately. . . . At least so the Blind Man explained the time that he came to pose for me as Judas, the Disciple. . . . He even brought a

vial, such as this, and showed it to me with great pride. He calls it the "Song of Darkness," for he gathers the herbs alone, and he brews the poison alone, although he can see nothing. Where did you get this, Francesca? . . . And why were you going to drink it?

[*She speaks casually, but she does not quite succeed in hiding her troubled curiosity and concern.* FRANCESCA *looks up bitterly.*]

FRANCESCA [*significantly*]: Don't you know?

CLEOFANTE [*steadily*]: Certainly not. . . . Why?

FRANCESCA [*rising*]: Oh, God!

[*She passes* CLEOFANTE *as if spurning her, and all things else in a moment of supreme disgust.* CLEOFANTE *watches her cautiously, and then summons all her esprit to meet the situation; following* FRANCESCA *she lays an arm about her shoulders and speaks with apparent concern.*]

CLEOFANTE: Come, confess; what has troubled you, child?

FRANCESCA [*withdrawing from* CLEOFANTE'S *touch, but answering her with painful directness*]: Your love for Tiero,—and his love for you.

CLEOFANTE [*furious, at a loss, fighting against the truth*]: But . . . ? What right have you to think this?

FRANCESCA: Cleofante,—I *know*. . . . [*There is such authority in her manner and voice that* CLEOFANTE *is hushed. She makes no further effort to speak, but stands still, regarding* FRANCESCA *thoughtfully.* FRANCESCA *goes to the table and lifts the lid of the jewel box, which she holds toward* CLEO-

FANTE *for an instant.*] These are the jewels that he gave me.

[*She sets the box back on the table with a gesture of final renunciation. From her neck she takes a key on a long, golden chain; the key and the chain she lays on the box,—and then very quietly but swiftly, as if putting everything behind her, she goes out, across the terrace and down the avenue.* CLEOFANTE *watches her from the window, still thoughtful and grave. A little page enters.*]

PAGE: The Count desires to know if Madonna will taste the new wine, and will she have it brought to her here, or will she join the others in the loggia?

CLEOFANTE: No . . . yes . . . A glass here. . . . No, two glasses,—and tell Messer Setoni that I wish to speak to him.

PAGE: Yes, Madonna.

[*The* PAGE *goes out.* CLEOFANTE *opens the box of jewels and plays her fingers among them, drawing up strands of pearls and diamonds from the depth of the box and enjoying their beauty in the light. . . . Then she closes the box, locks it, and places it, with the vial of poison, in a drawer of a cabinet. As she moves away, she pauses sharply, hearing a step on the terrace.* TIERO *appears in the window. He stops short at seeing her, and then slowly comes toward her. She stands perfectly still;* TIERO *pauses, looking at her, and then leans against a heavy chair*

as though tired. He speaks almost impersonally in a weary, agitated voice.]

TIERO: What a strange woman you are!

[*He would put his arms about her, but* CLEOFANTE *draws back. He turns suddenly and goes out upon the terrace.* CLEOFANTE *calls softly after him.*]

CLEOFANTE: Tiero!

TIERO [*answering from outside*]: Yes?

CLEOFANTE: Where are you going?

TIERO [*coming back to the window*]: Does it matter? I don't know. . . . Nowhere. . . . To the lake, perhaps, . . . do you want to come?

CLEOFANTE: Perhaps—presently—

TIERO: Very well. I will wait for you.

[*He comes back into the room and starts to leave by another door.*]

CLEOFANTE: Where are you going, now?

TIERO [*petulantly*]: Would you ask of a child the questions that you put to me? [*She does not answer, and he continues, less complainingly, but a little theatrically.*] I am going to look at my rival, the portrait of Tiero!

[*He leaves her abruptly. At the same time the* PAGE *enters from another direction bringing the wine on a tray. As he places it on the table,* SETONI *follows. The* PAGE *withdraws.* CLEOFANTE *sits beside the table, and* SETONI *sits opposite her.*]

CLEOFANTE: Will you try the new wine?

SETONI: Not so soon again. I have been drinking it with the others.

[CLEOFANTE *regards it.*]

CLEOFANTE: How dark it is! Like purple grapes crushed in red soil! [*She tastes it and continues.*] It is rather heavy. I do not think I like it. But I know very little about wines. . . . They are Sigolio's passion. It is a wise man, Setoni, who has a passion that will lie still. The casks in Sigolio's cellar lie still; and the pictures and books that are your passion lie still. To love a living thing is folly and madness, I think. . . . It places one so at the mercy of another mind, another will, another *self*, really. . . . A little while ago I took a bottle of poison out of the hand of Francesca.

SETONI: Poison? The little Francesca?

CLEOFANTE: Yes. . . . She confessed that she wanted to die. Because she thinks Tiero no longer loves her; because she thinks he loves me. Imagine it!

SETONI: Nothing seems so tragic to one who is old as the death of one who is young, and this alone proves that life is a good thing.

CLEOFANTE: I wonder . . . ? If one is an artist, yes. I myself feel that I have that genius that undoubtedly dominates our greatest modern painters. . . . At times, Setoni, I have rebelled at the devotion that I have felt for this supreme interest in my life. I have known weariness, loneliness, despair, but I have kept on. . . . As an artist I have accepted myself. . . . Nothing else has mattered.

SETONI [*leaning toward her, and speaking very low*]: Not even—*Tiero?*

CLEOFANTE: Ah, you, too! You think *that*, too?

SETONI: There is a mystic relation between the man and the picture. There is a life-likeness,—a breath

borne to the canvas,—a quality that hints of passion and birth and death. . . . What else am I to think? Not Raphael or Titian could have painted such a thing unmoved, unstirred. . . . Keep your secret, Cleofante. . . . But what I think—I think. . . .

[CLEOFANTE *is silent for a moment; then she begins to speak again in almost a stifled voice.*]

CLEOFANTE: This I will tell you. . . . The night that Tiero came into this house, I knew I should paint a wonderful portrait of him. To watch his face I made him talk. His eyes were often troubled by my most casual remarks—and so I looked at him as many men must have looked at many women, with an amused contempt for his inhibitions, his stupidity,—but with a great contentment with his beauty. . . . Then I grew obsessed by my ambition to infuse his youth and splendor into the portrait that I immediately began. His passionate vitality was like a strong glare in which I lived and worked. I was interested in finding myself alive to this light, this warmth. I had decided that I was not born to feel intimate sensations; that I stood upon the shore of my life flinging my dreams into far and impersonal distances, and so I was a little amazed at finding a human being so close to me. . . . The portrait grew and was finished. . . . And then came the day when I perceived that it was more beautiful than Tiero. . . . Yes, he loves me, I suppose. . . . But I want him to go away. . . . I do not want it said that he inspired me . . . that I owe anything to him. . . . I want to begin a new portrait that shall again assert my genius. I cannot work in this

uneasy mood. What shall I do, Setoni? He is always coming to me with his subtle claims. I find it difficult to deny them. Then, there is Francesca. She will not marry him, now. What tale are people going to tell?

[Cleofante *looks at her wine, and sips it slowly, nervously.* Setoni *looks at her, smiling amusedly and significantly.*]

Setoni: I will speak to Tiero.

Cleofante [*apprehensively*]: What will you say —about me?

Setoni: I will not mention you. . . . You are certain that you want him to go away?

Cleofante [*after a slight, sharp pause*]: Yes. . . . You swear not to speak of me?

Setoni: I swear. . . . There will be no need. I will speak of Francesca.

Cleofante [*rising quickly*]: I will send him to you. [*She goes quickly out.* Setoni *waits an instant and* Cleofante *reappears with* Tiero.] Here is Tiero, Setoni.

[*She goes out, leaving the two men together.* Tiero *is surprised and resentful at being so suddenly deserted by her.*]

Setoni [*explaining*]: I told Cleofante that I wished to speak to you alone, Tiero.

Tiero [*still standing, aloof and questioning*]: Well . . . ?

Setoni [*as if deciding to come to the point at once*]: An inexplicable and tragic thing almost happened a little while ago. . . . Francesca was discovered with a vial of poison at her lips.

Tiero: Francesca? [*He thinks a moment and then*

seats himself, leaning toward SETONI.] You have a sharp way of putting forth your meaning in smooth and wandering words, Messer Setoni. I have no such talent, and little taste for it in another. Your words run like hounds in circles. Mine are arrows that go straight. Let them pierce you now, since you invited them. There is nothing, nothing at all, that I could or would do with Francesca's life. It does not concern me any longer. If she wishes to die—she must die.

SETONI [*meditatively*]: I am glad that I am no longer young.

TIERO: I know the ways of hounds, sir. I see where your words point. You are at ease because no longer must you break yourself or another.

SETONI: An old man does not bear the hopes of his father's house; he is not needed in war; no woman fastens her happiness upon him. It is not necessary for him to lie beneath the obdurate walls of a city from whose heights he would see his ensign ride the air. . . . All bitter things are over and done with when a man is old. Then he may sit still and watch. And he is often amused at the odds that people seek and give. . . . There are no odds to age. One man's wife is as beautiful as another's—or if not so beautiful, more desirable in some other way. One man's life is as rich as another's. All passions are a little remarkable and a little absurd,—and if they burn high they do not burn long. . . . But wisdom makes life a pleasant thing—and an old man hopes —if he hopes at all—that other boats at sea will find the quiet harbor where his own life rides at anchor

as gently as white clouds ride in a rainless Autumn sky. . . .

TIERO [*sharply*]: I will not give up loving Cleofante to reach any harbor that waits for any man in the world. I will not cheat myself with such wisdom as yours,—not to save Francesca, not to save myself,—not even to save Cleofante. You have seen into my passion for her; but you have not seen beyond the obdurate walls of her silence and her pride, for she is a veiled woman and often her mysteries rise between us like war—even when she lies in my arms, and her breath struggles in her throat like sobs, from our kisses. Cleofante is not an easy woman, or a simple one, to love, for she is prouder than a city under the ensign of an old enemy. But she is like a strange land that one has found and cannot leave as long as one lives.

[*He pauses.* SETONI *plucks at a tassel of the table cover and does not at once speak.* TIERO *stares at nothing. At last* SETONI *rises.*]

SETONI: There is nothing more to say. I have been intrusive. I am sorry.

[TIERO *rises also.* SETONI *turns as if to speak to him again when* SIGOLIO *enters with* CLEOFANTE, *followed by the* CARDINAL *and the other guests.* CLEOFANTE *searches* SETONI'S *face for evidence of what has been said, but there is no sign in his calm and ironic countenance.*]

SIGOLIO: Let us hope that Messer Giovannino's poem, when he has finished it, and brings it to us, will be worthy of the new wine. [*He seats him-*

self in his great chair and addresses the room in general.] There is something after all in this habitual practice of the arts that is making our Italian cities very charming and civilized places. . . . The poets talk, talk, talk. . . . And I, for one, find a poet's talk much more agreeable, more fanciful, more interesting than his verses. One never takes poets seriously, of course; yet their exaggerated and rich speech has a certain decorative value in a conversation. One has them about as one has those silver vases, for instance. And now and again they put some deep thing that they have seen or felt into their verse—saying it expertly and for all time. Of course, painting and sculpture are the more serious and necessary arts, if life is to become an expression of one's tastes and one's power. Yet, the poet gives life a flavor more potent perhaps, because more intelligently imaginative than music—and yet with the cry and emotion of music. [*To the* CARDINAL.] Of religion, my lord—I say—

[*But he pauses, listening, and turns toward the terrace. The others follow his gaze. Four servants appear, carrying something between them up the stairs. They stop as soon as they have reached the terrace level.*]

SIGOLIO: What have you there . . . !

ONE SERVANT: The body of the Lady Francesca, my lord; she has drowned herself in the lake.

[SIGOLIO *rises slowly. There is no movement except his own as he turns slowly to the* CARDINAL.]

SIGOLIO: Come, my lord. [*They start toward the terrace,* SIGOLIO *leaning on the* CARDINAL'S *arm.*

CLEOFANTE *starts forward; but* SIGOLIO *touches her on the shoulder, speaking as he would to a child.*] Stay here. . . .

[*He goes out upon the terrace and signals to the servants to follow him with their burden.* FRANCESCA'S *wet golden hair falls loose as she is borne aloft.* CLEOFANTE *closes her eyes; one or two of the guests drop to their knees; the others remain standing with bowed heads. . . . There is a pause after the little procession disappears. It is broken by a long sigh from* TIERO, *who speaks presently in a low, amazed voice.*]

TIERO: How little she looked!

[*A general movement breaks the tensity.* SETONI *gropes forward and clings to the back of a chair. One by one the guests bow to* CLEOFANTE *and go.*]

ONE GUEST: I will leave you now, Madonna.

ANOTHER: The pathos of her falling wet hair!

ANOTHER: We will go. Your house has our great sympathy.

ANOTHER: I am trembling and feel the tears coming.

[CLEOFANTE *inclines her head to each, and they leave, silent and subdued, bowing to* SETONI *and* TIERO, *who stand by, grave and quiet. . . . When the others have gone,* TIERO, CLEOFANTE *and* SETONI *can find nothing to say to one another.* TIERO *suddenly goes out upon the terrace and sits on the balustrade, staring out over the gardens. His hounds come to him, and leap up, catch-*

ing at his knees. SETONI *and* CLEOFANTE *move together.* SETONI *indicates* TIERO.]

SETONI: I am glad that I am an old man.

CLEOFANTE [*meditative and grave*]: I suppose she had to die. She was not qualified for life. After all, death is the most beautiful thing that can come to any one. And those who are beautiful should die before their beauty goes. Only those who have work to do should live. I have wanted to die, often, but I could never bring myself to *stop*. I have had to go on because of the things I had to do. Work alone qualifies us for life, Setoni. It is much more exquisite to be blown from the tree as a flower than to be shaken down as a shriveled and bitter fruit. . . . I envy Francesca a little. She has completed herself with a supremely romantic act. . . . If I could die—and still do my work—I would. But my work is more important than my life, or my death.

SETONI: You are very modern, Cleofante, and, as you have well said, you seem to stand on the shore of life and fling your dreams into far and impersonal distances. Emotions do not halt your mind. Your thoughts go farther than human actions and far beyond all human intimacies. But I cannot keep up with you. I cannot go so far, nor so swiftly, nor so serenely. I am still bound by old prejudices, old weaknesses—such as my involuntary affection for Francesca, and by such sympathy, for instance, as I feel now for that boy yonder. In spite of my cold, steel-like admiration for you, Cleofante, and in spite of the thrill of going far and deep that makes every conversation with you an adventure, I feel in some mysterious way that you are worth less than

he. His soul has finer proportions than yours. For after all, the artist is only a Hand . . . but a human being is a human being. . . .

[CLEOFANTE *has grown hard and cold. She thinks before replying, and then speaks thoughtfully but with a dull envy in her voice.*]

CLEOFANTE: One chooses. . . . One cannot both live and die. . . . One cannot possess the grace of beauty and at the same time the fascination of ugliness. . . . One cannot grow to be a great Hand without losing all conventional proportions. That is my deep sorrow, Setoni,—the limitations that beset me. I would touch everything—be everything—possess everything—and yet not lose myself in the ritual of power—or the ritual of passion. I wish to be both drunken and sober. . . . Which is impossible . . . unless, indeed, I am. [*Her voice drops to a whisper. Suddenly she speaks again, with a sort of speculative malice.*] So Tiero is, in a way, my rival, you think? I can see that you consider the greatness of the portrait due to much that he brought to it—much that my hand—alone—could not have created?

SETONI: Yes.

CLEOFANTE [*changing the subject, and speaking casually*]: What did you say to him, Setoni? Did you persuade him to go and leave me in peace?

SETONI: I spoke to him of Francesca's attempt to drink poison. I thought that he had the human vanity for sacrifice. But he is neither weak nor vain. If Francesca wished to die, he said, she must; he

would not be driven by pity for another away from you.

CLEOFANTE: How beautiful passion is in a man, and how humiliating in a woman! [*She pauses, and then continues thoughtfully.*] Tiero should also die —in battle, perhaps. . . . [*Again she continues after a pause.*] Now that Francesca is dead, perhaps he will see that there is no possible excuse for his staying longer in this house. . . . [*Her voice grows suddenly hopeful.*] I will tell Sigolio to get rid of him.

[SETONI *is amused, and lifts his eyebrows.*]

SETONI: Sigolio—? Sigolio is as proud as he is hospitable. It amuses Sigolio to see young men languishing for his wife. He is very proud of Tiero's devotion, I think. Sigolio knows well how to pour the poison into those situations, which he likes to keep in his hand like—playthings. Who was it, Cleofante, that first insinuated your debt to Tiero? Was it not Sigolio?

CLEOFANTE: Yes. I remember. It *was* Sigolio who poured the poison into that state of ecstasy in which, for a while, I lived. . . . When the soul obeyed the senses, and the senses obeyed the soul. . . . But he should have been quicker with the poison. He was not clever enough, Setoni—for there was a time— [*She pauses, and begins in a voice tremulous with emotion.*] Was it love . . . ? I do not like to think so now, but Tiero brought into my life a mysterious emotion that in moments of deep thinking still confuses me with humiliation. I lied to you, Setoni. . . . Tiero has been my lover. The third day that he posed for his portrait—I was

nervous, vexed. I could not paint. And when suddenly he abandoned his pose and put his arms about me, I was relaxed and indulgent. There was a moment, when I stared into his eyes, as his face bent above my own, such as I have never otherwise known. A river seemed to come flowing, with a great murmur, from some indescribable distance through the silence that hung between us. . . . But he has disappointed me. He is not so beautiful as the portrait. Sigolio was very clever to make me hate him; but I have discovered that it is not Tiero who made the portrait what it is. It was my own vision of him; my own illusion. Even you have failed to understand that, Setoni; even you have failed to understand that this vision, this conception, sprang from my own imagination, from a force in my own mind to which he—nor any other human being—could contribute.

SETONI: Perhaps. . . . I will leave you now, Cleofante.

CLEOFANTE: Do not go! I am being torn to pieces by all the things I feel! I must be free of Tiero—free of hating him and free of loving him—free of my debt to him! Free of his stupidity and his demands! What can I do, Setoni? His insane love is like a cage that has no door through which I can escape. . . . I must work, Setoni. I must be free and cold, again,—and quiet—like a tree when there is no wind. How can I put myself to the test when I am shaken and bent and caught up at my roots by this whirlwind of human emotions? Vanity, passion, ambition, hate, malice and restlessness—all are swarming in my heart like angry bees—filling it with

a honey on which I cannot feed and live! Tiero must go, Setoni. I must be at peace.

[*She lays her hand on his arm. But he rises slowly as if he had not been listening.*]

SETONI: I will leave you now. . . . I am thinking of the little Francesca, and there is nothing to say.

[CLEOFANTE, *left alone, sits staring out on the terrace at* TIERO. *Menace is in her eyes. She paces the room once and then stops, decisively. She calls.*]

CLEOFANTE: Tiero . . . ! [*He does not hear. She calls more sharply.*] Tiero!

[*He rises.*]

TIERO [*advancing slowly*]: Yes, Cleofante.

CLEOFANTE: [*impersonally*]: Francesca is dead; you must go home now, Tiero. . . . For a little while at least.

TIERO: No, no. . . . Not now. . . . It is too late, now. [*He comes close to her and places his arms about her.*] Our love has exacted a living sacrifice. It has been fed, like the deities of old, with the flesh and blood of a human being. Surely now the cold clouds that have been floating between us will lift and vanish. The death of Francesca has set me free to love you perfectly—always, Cleofante.

CLEOFANTE: You will not go—not if I ask it?

[*She is impenetrable.*]

TIERO: I will never leave you now, Cleofante. I have won you with terrible gifts,—love and fame and death; and I will keep you! You are only a woman, after all,—with soft hair and soft hands and soft kisses; some day I will draw my knife through

the portrait that you love so much—and then you will be all mine again.

[CLEOFANTE *draws back in sudden anger and fear. At this moment the* PAGE *enters and starts to remove the glasses of wine over which* CLEOFANTE *and* SETONI *recently sat.* CLEOFANTE, *under pretense of directing him, moves to the table.*]

CLEOFANTE [*to the* PAGE, *sharply*]: No,—leave those. . . . [*The* PAGE *moves to the cabinet and takes away the fruit.* CLEOFANTE *follows him, talking over her shoulder to* TIERO.] You have not tasted the new wine, yet, Tiero. Setoni's glass is untouched. You shall have it.

[TIERO *has flung himself down on a couch, and his mood is disturbed by* CLEOFANTE'S *casual suggestion.*]

TIERO [*almost sullenly*]: I do not want any wine, Cleofante.

[CLEOFANTE *unlocks the cabinet and takes out the vial of poison, concealing it in her hand. She sits by the table and sips her wine, watching for a chance to pour the poison into* TIERO'S *glass.*]

CLEOFANTE [*significantly*]: Sigolio's first and second wives died mysteriously. He is very watchful.

TIERO [*scornfully*]: Are you afraid? You have suddenly become a coward, then!

CLEOFANTE [*meditatively*]: No, I have never been afraid of anything in my life. . . . Won't you drink, Tiero? This new wine has a mysterious flavor.

TIERO [*briefly, coldly*]: No.

[CLEOFANTE *sips the wine and watches him*

narrowly. He closes his eyes suddenly and she is about to pour the wine when he looks at her again. Her outstretched hand falls on a plate of fruit. TIERO *stares at her helplessly, broodingly, then suddenly his mood changes. He flings himself down on the couch, and cries out desperately.*]

TIERO: I am sick! Sick in soul and mind and body! That piece of canvas means more to you than my living self. You are like those women who take from one man what they give to another. You have cheated me, and starved me, and sickened me!

[*His face drops into the hollow of his arm.* CLEOFANTE *now pours out the poison, swiftly, but cautiously, and as swiftly and cautiously she locks the empty vial in the cabinet drawer, and then goes to* TIERO *and sits beside him, bending over him.*]

CLEOFANTE [*softly*]: Let my tenderness cure you, my darling.

[*Her arms are about him, and she lifts his face to hers.*]

TIERO [*shaken with sudden passion*]: Cleofante—

[*He draws her to him and she yields as if talking to a child, playing her fingers through his hair and letting him sob against her breast.*]

CLEOFANTE: Kiss me . . . again. . . . Kiss me. Are the bad thoughts gone, now?

TIERO: They are going. . . . Oh, Cleofante! Why do you make me suffer? Why do you give yourself to me—and then take yourself away? Love me! Love me as I love you. . . . Keep nothing back. . . .

CLEOFANTE: How hot your face is! And your hands! [*She rises and brings the poisoned wine. She slips her arm under his head, lifting his lips toward the glass, and speaks authoritatively as to a sick child.*] Drink this—drink it all, my darling.

[*He obeys her silently. She gives him all that the glass contains without a tremor. Then she rises with a calm smile and goes to place the empty glass on the table, but it falls from her hand and breaks on the floor.*]

TIERO [*observing it and speaking meditatively*]: Death, I think, is only the falling and the shattering of a wine cup.

[CLEOFANTE *is startled by the words, and her smile goes. Something soft and regretful comes into her face, and she returns to* TIERO *and sits beside him, her arms about him. It is growing darker outside.*]

CLEOFANTE [*gently*]: Do you remember, Tiero, one evening beside the central fountain—when a nightingale sang, and I said that its nest might have been in my heart—so close its song came through our silence?

TIERO: I remember. . . .

CLEOFANTE: It is growing dark. The nightingale will sing, presently. . . . Go and wait for me there.

TIERO: I cannot leave you, Cleofante—not even to go from you one instant and wait for you until the next.

CLEOFANTE [*rising*]: Go and wait for me by the fountain, Tiero. . . .

[TIERO *rises, goes to her, and puts his arms about her.*]

TIERO: What a strange woman you are! Shall I never know you? Shall I always be tossed about by your inexplicable moods like the dust about the feet of a running horse?

CLEOFANTE: Will you wait beside the fountain until I come, Tiero?

TIERO: I will wait . . . but come quickly . . . for I—I— [*His voice drops to a whisper. He is trembling.*] —I need you.

CLEOFANTE: I will come. [*With a triumphant tenderness she winds her arms about him and drains his lips of a long kiss. Then she stands away from him.*] Go. . . .

[TIERO *passes his hand across his eyes, and goes.* CLEOFANTE *stands motionless looking after him.* SETONI *enters and sits down heavily in the big chair. Suddenly* CLEOFANTE, *who is looking off, gives a low cry. . . .* SETONI *rises and turns toward her. He is almost a shadow in the room.* CLEOFANTE *sees him, and at first shrinks away from him; then recognizing him, she lays her hand on his arm and points out toward the garden; he draws back, amazed, questioning, incredulous, horrified. For a second there is silence. Then* CLEOFANTE *speaks, in a low vibrant voice.*]

CLEOFANTE: Will you please tell me if there was any other way? But this must remain a secret between us, Setoni. If my husband knew that I had poisoned a man he might be jealous. . . . Then—people are still very prejudiced against murder. . . .

And it seems such a little thing when one is doing it. . . .

[*She stares straight ahead, smiling faintly at nothing.* A PAGE *enters with lighted lamps. Somewhere, close at hand, a nightingdale begins to sing.* SETONI *makes his way to* SIGOLIO'S *great chair, and huddles into its depths.*]

CURTAIN

TRAP DOORS

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TRAP DOORS

by

ALFRED KREYMBORG

CHARACTERS

SHOPPERS: Miss Daisy and Mr. Tentative.
SHOPKEEPERS: Mr. Dairy, Mr. Twyce, Mr. Cobb, Mr. Finn, Mr. Lamb, Mr. Doodle.
EXTRAS: The Moon and Tattle.

TIME: *Early on any spring morning.*
PLACE: *An imaginary town or village street most anywhere.*

SCENE: *The street is bare, except for parallel rows of shops with trap doors that open with the magic suddenness of cuckoo-clocks so as to release the capering figure of a shopkeeper ready for trade. The shops have been created out of beaver boards or canvas, and do their advertising with painted hieroglyphs sprawled across show-windows in some modest, though symbolical pattern. The shopkeepers (or the two or three protean mummers who wear and change masks in order to reduce the cast of characters) are*

friendly folk who hop from their dens almost as soon as the door-bell rings—which it will if you touch the right button. A not so imaginary man and woman, shopping. The questions the woman asks and the queries the man propounds resemble each other not a little; frequently, the latter fall into slow, bashful replicas of the former. The responses of the shopkeepers participate in a rhapsodic ritual composed of generation upon generation of traditional phrases. The shoppers are very small and, were they puppets, would expand or diminish in accordance with the circumstantial action of the plot. The shopkeepers are nearly as large as fate. . . . The woman is first on the scene. Her name is Miss Daisy. *Her movements and speech are intuitive. She knows what to do with her feet and tongue. This morning, she first brings them straight to the man who sells butter and eggs. His name is* Mr. Dairy. *Their colloquy is a crisp, professional staccato.*

Miss Daisy: Good morning, Mr. Dairy—
Mr. Dairy: Good morning, Miss Daisy—
Miss Daisy: Nice day for a change—
Mr. Dairy: Couldn't be nicer, mam—
Miss Daisy: What have you got to-day?—
Mr. Dairy: What'll you have?—
Miss Daisy: Any eggs?—
Mr. Dairy: Crates and crates—

MISS DAISY: Are they fresh?—
MR. DAIRY: Fresher than chickens—
MISS DAISY: Strictly fresh?—
MR. DAIRY: Straight from the hens themselves—
MISS DAISY: How much?—
MR. DAIRY: 34, 45, 56, 67—
MISS DAISY: What are you up to?—
MR. DAIRY: Nothing in particular—
MISS DAISY: Yesterday they were 33, 44—
MR. DAIRY: That was for yesterday's—
MISS DAISY: What's the odds?—
MR. DAIRY: To-day's are fresher—
MISS DAISY: Give me one—
MR. DAIRY: Only one?—
MISS DAISY: The very best—
MR. DAIRY: The 78?—
MISS DAISY: The 33. [*He dodges into his shop and bobs out with an egg. Meanwhile, the other shopper,* MR. TENTATIVE, *has come into view and tried a timid zigzag which somehow brings him just behind* MISS DAISY, *where he halts, tying his feet with embarrassment.* MISS DAISY *tosses a coin to* MR. DAIRY, *who catches it deftly.*] Thank you, Mr. Dairy; looks like rain—
MR. DAIRY: Thank you, Miss Daisy; call again.

[MISS DAISY *turns abruptly, sees* MR. TENTATIVE, *gives him an altitudinous stare, lifts her nose and skirt and tacks around him so breezily that that gentleman shrinks perceptibly. She disappears, and* MR. DAIRY *has to come to* MR. TENTATIVE'S *rescue. The tempo of the next dialogue is not only slower, but is afflicted with rubati.*]

MR. DAIRY: How do you do, Mr. Tentative?—
MR. TENTATIVE: Might do better, might do worse—
MR. DAIRY: Isn't it a fine morning, though?—
MR. TENTATIVE: It looks like rain and feels like snow—
MR. DAIRY: What brings you down to market to-day?—
MR. TENTATIVE: My unfailing appetite—
MR. DAIRY: How large might that be?—
MR. TENTATIVE: I suppose an egg would measure it—
MR. DAIRY: Only one?—
MR. TENTATIVE: Perhaps you'd better make it two—
MR. DAIRY: It looks to me you ought to grow fatter— If your health is failing, two eggs won't do—
MR. TENTATIVE: Doubtless you'd better make it three—
MR. DAIRY: Got a hard day's work ahead of you?—
MR. TENTATIVE: Something or other that doesn't matter—
MR. DAIRY: Best make it four and help it thrive—
MR. TENTATIVE: Four?—
MR. DAIRY: Five!—
MR. TENTATIVE: How much are they?—
MR. DAIRY: 35, 46, 57, 68—
MR. TENTATIVE: Hold on—
MR. DAIRY: Why?—
MR. TENTATIVE: It seems to me you're rather high—
MR. DAIRY: I?—
MR. TENTATIVE: Your prices—
MR. DAIRY: I can bring them down again—
MR. TENTATIVE: Pray do—

MR. DAIRY: 91, 80, 69—
MR. TENTATIVE: That's fine—
MR. DAIRY: 58, 47, 36—
MR. TENTATIVE: Much better—
MR. DAIRY: Which'll you have?—
MR. TENTATIVE: Beholding a man who is poor—and lonely through living alone—above, below, behind, before—fetch out a crumb or a bone.

[MR. DAIRY *pops into and out of his shop and hands his customer six eggs. The latter pulls out a long stocking and out of that, with increasing difficulty, a coin.* MISS DAISY *comes swiftly down the street, en route to* MR. TWYCE, *the baker, across the way.* MR. DAIRY *takes the coin, bites it, tucks it away and cries.*]

MR. DAIRY: Not enough— [MR. TENTATIVE *pulls again.*] Not enough— [*Pulls again.*] These eggs are straight from the hen— Try again— [*Pulls once more.*] That'll do— [*Pulls too often.*] Thank you!

[MR. TENTATIVE *peeps into and drops the empty stocking and then tucks the eggs under his arm—three under each. He spies* MISS DAISY *pressing the baker's bell—drops an egg—and tries to pick it up.*]

MR. TENTATIVE: Oh!—
MR. DAIRY: Ah!

[MR. TENTATIVE *moves off, his feet scraping sheepishly. He drops another egg—with an oh,* MR. DAIRY, *with an ah.* MISS DAISY *glares at* MR. TENTATIVE. *He drops another, another—with an oh, oh—and an ah,*

ah. MISS DAISY *turns her back on him—he drops the fifth. The absent-minded* MR. TWYCE *appears.* MR. TENTATIVE *clutches the last egg and runs.* MR. DAIRY *disappears with a cavernous ha.* MISS DAISY *tilts her head obliviously and addresses the abstracted* MR. TWYCE.]

MISS DAISY: Good morning; it's a nice—

MR. TWYCE: I beg pardon?—

MISS DAISY: Good morning, I say—that's twice—

MR. TWYCE: That's me—

MISS DAISY: You must have dough in your ears—

MR. TWYCE: Why not, after all these years?—a baker sees little, there's little he hears—and go too near ovens, your eyes fill with tears—

MISS DAISY: And what might that mean?—

MR. TWYCE: Betwixt and between—

MISS DAISY: The buns you sold me yesterday were hard to bite, and tasted gray—

MR. TWYCE: But now I can sell you a tart or a pie, biscuits fresh as the sun in the sky—

MISS DAISY: Why?—

MR. TWYCE: Last night toward twilight, I began baking things, all the way from crullers to rings, all the way to a moment ago, and all the way down to now—

MISS DAISY: How?—

MR. TWYCE: On both sides—

MISS DAISY: Twice? —

MR. TWYCE: That's me!

[MR. TENTATIVE *comes edging along the street. He stops at the corner grocery—*

which belongs to MR. COBB. *A somewhat discordant quartet ensues.*]

MR. COBB: Good morning, Mr. Tentative—

MR. TENTATIVE: Good morning, Mr. Cobb—

MISS DAISY: I'd like a biscuit—

MR. TWYCE: Is that all?—

MR. TENTATIVE: I'd like—

MISS DAISY: A biscuit shaped like a crescent—

MR. TENTATIVE: I should like—

MR. COBB: What is it, which is it?—

MR. TENTATIVE: I'd very much like—

[MR. TWYCE *bobs into and out of his shop with a biscuit.*]

MISS DAISY: I didn't order a collar— MR. TWYCE *bobs again.*] Nor a necklace—

MR. TWYCE: How about a bracelet?—

MISS DAISY: That would be better—

[MR. TWYCE *bobs again.*]

MR. TENTATIVE: What I should like—

MR. COBB: Is?—

MISS DAISY: How much is this crust?—

MR. TWYCE: The cost depends on the weight—

MISS DAISY: Is it crisp?—

MR. TWYCE: All the way through, from head to toe—

MISS DAISY: Then it must be light!—

MR. TWYCE: I'm afraid you're right!

[MISS DAISY *flips a tiny coin to* MR. TWYCE *and wears the biscuit around her wrist.*]

MR. TENTATIVE: I'm afraid what I'd like—is simply not here—

MR. COBB: Not where?—

MR. TENTATIVE: I've come to the wrong store—

MISS DAISY: Good morning, once more—
MR. TENTATIVE: That is to say—
MISS DAISY: Good day, Mr. Dough—
MR. TWYCE: Eh?— Good day, Miss Daisy—
MR. TENTATIVE: What I wanted was—what was it, anyhow?— Oh, now I know—a zwieback!—
MR. COBB: You're on the wrong track—there's the man who bakes bread—you're a cabbage, a carrot, a parsnip, a turnip, with eyes in the back of your head!

[*Is about to slam the door, when* MISS DAISY *calls out*—]

MISS DAISY: Oh, Mr. Cobb—
MR. COBB: Yes, Miss Daisy?—
MISS DAISY: Wait, I'm coming—
MR. COBB: Come, I'm waiting.

[MR. TWYCE *starts to close up shop, when* MR. TENTATIVE *wistfully calls*—] . . .

MR. TENTATIVE: Oh, Mr. Once, Mr. Twyce—
MR. TWYCE: What is it, Dunce?—
MR. TENTATIVE: I'm coming—
MR. TWYCE: What for?—
MR. TENTATIVE: Some zwieback—
MR. TWYCE: That's me.

[MISS DAISY *and* MR. TENTATIVE *cross. She grows taller, he smaller, after the encounter. In the next quartet, the voices harmonize intermittently.*]

MISS DAISY: Have you got?—
MR. TENTATIVE: Have you not—
MISS DAISY: Any sugar?—
MR. TENTATIVE: Some sugar?—
MR. COBB: How much, mam—
MR. TWYCE: Wrong shop, man—

Miss Daisy: An apple-full—
Mr. Tentative: I meant—
Mr. Twyce: You're on the wrong scent—what's more—you called for zwieback before—
Mr. Tentative: So I did.

[Mr. Twyce *disappears.*]

Mr. Cobb: Which color did you wish? —
Miss Daisy: Green, yellow, crimson or white, two or three shades that mottle delight—
Mr. Cobb: And the size?—
Miss Daisy: So it doesn't weigh a ton or cost above a sou—
Mr. Cobb: Excuse me while I call one down and wrap it up in leaves for you.

[*He claps his hands. No response. He claps louder, and with syncopation.* Mr. Twyce *issues forth with a mysterious air. Incantations follow.*]

Mr. Twyce: Zwieback's an outlandish name that came this way when the Dutchmen came—the heathen word means baking twice, and that is what affects the price.

[Mr. Cobb *claps a strange cadence. And then unclaps. A green apple nestles in the palm of his hand.* Mr. Twyce *imitates a magician with a wand. Two zwieback appear.*]

Miss Daisy: Why green?—
Mr. Cobb: That remains to be seen—
Mr. Tentative: Why twain?—
Mr. Twyce: Because they are twins—
Miss Daisy: How much is it?—
Mr. Tentative: How much are they?—

MR. COBB: Cheap at half the price—
MR. TWYCE: Pay me double's my advice.

[MISS DAISY *tears off the leaves, takes a defiant bite, flips half a coin to the grocer and moves away.*]

MR. COBB: Hey, hey—
MISS DAISY: Do you want it back?—
MR. COBB: I can't sell an apple that's bitten—
MISS DAISY: Then why cry out, hey?—
MR. COBB: To wish you well smitten—
MISS DAISY: Not by you, sir—good day.

[*She disappears.* MR. TENTATIVE *heaves a sigh and drops one of the zwieback.* MR. TWYCE *picks it up, brushes it off and tosses it back into his shop.*]

MR. TWYCE: A man who trembles must be feeble—who soils my merchandise pays me treble. [MR. TENTATIVE *draws forth a new stocking. The quibbling is varied.*] Inaccurate— [MR. TENTATIVE *yanks.*] Inadequate— [MR. TENTATIVE *pulls and hauls.*] You addlepate—

[MR. TENTATIVE *slings the stocking round the baker's neck and staggers down the street. But by dint of an occasional bite and crunch, he straightens himself a bit.* MESSRS. TWYCE *and* COBB *look after him, and as he vanishes, grin and nod to each other. They are joined by* MR. DAIRY—*yawning and stretching. A lazy trio follows.*]

MR. DAIRY: What's up?—
MR. COBB: You're missing the fun—
MR. TWYCE: He, he —
MR. DAIRY: What fun?—

MR. TWYCE: A man and a woman—
MR. COBB: Ha, ha—
MR. DAIRY: Which chasing which?—
MR. COBB: Tentative—
MR. TWYCE: Daisy—
MR. DAIRY: I see—
MR. TWYCE: You do?—
MR. COBB: Do you?—
MR. DAIRY: I sold her an egg, and I sold him six—
MR. TWYCE: I sold her a biscuit, and sold him two—
MR. COBB: I sold her an apple for him to chew—
THE TRIO: Ho, ho.

[*A distant church steeple strikes nine. The shopkeepers pull out three old chairs and three mellow pipes.*]

MR. DAIRY: I've worked very—
MR. TWYCE: Very—
MR. COBB: Hard—
MR. DAIRY: A little—
MR. TWYCE: Rest—
MR. COBB: Is good—
MR. DAIRY: For the body—
MR. TWYCE: The spirit—
MR. COBB: The soul—
MR. DAIRY: A man can't stand at a counter all day—
MR. TWYCE: Be true to his vocation—
MR. COBB: Give folk the service they deserve—
MR. DAIRY: Without now and then—
MR. TWYCE: Stretching his arms—
MR. COBB: Rubbing his eyes—
THE TRIO: And yawning.

[*They do all three.*]

MR. DAIRY: An intermission—

MR. TWYCE: Intermezzo—
MR. COBB: Interlude—
MR. DAIRY: Till the next—
MR. TWYCE: Customer —
MR. COBB: Comes—
MR. DAIRY: And may he—
MR. TWYCE: Or she—
MR. COBB: Or they—
MR. DAIRY: Come soon—
MR. TWYCE: But not—
MR. COBB: Too soon—
MR. DAIRY: Trade isn't—
MR. TWYCE: As bad—
MR. COBB: As all that—
MR. DAIRY: Trade—
MR. TWYCE: Isn't bad—
MR. COBB: At all.

[*They stretch, rub and yawn again. Their chairs tilt back; their pipes puff voluptuously.* MR. DAIRY *raises his pipestem. They chant a fairly meaningless, though not entirely inappropriate, ditty to the rising and falling of an imaginary balance or scale—which* MR. DAIRY *imitates with his baton.*]

MR. DAIRY: Now, when a body needs a meal—
MR. TWYCE: One can't expect a man to steal—
MR. COBB: So people pay for what they feel—
MR. DAIRY: I put some butter on one scale—
MR. TWYCE: And I the rolls that never stale—
MR. COBB: And I the fruits that are for sale—
MR. DAIRY: I place a weight upon the other—
MR. TWYCE: And rather than create a bother—
MR. COBB: I lay a second near its brother—

Mr. Dairy: And if the see-saw's still awry—
Mr. Twyce: The weights too low, the food too high—
Mr. Cobb: Add or subtract until they lie—
Mr. Dairy: Until one can't say yes or no—
Mr. Twyce: The balance horizontal so—
Mr. Cobb: 'Tis thus the prices come and go.

[*The steeple chimes eleven.* Mr. Tentative *comes along, vaguely stepping an accent late on each chime. The shopkeepers rouse themselves, hustle into their shops with their chairs and pipes, and reappear, rubbing their hands.*]

Mr. Dairy: He's first this time—
Mr. Twice: Is he coming this way?—
Mr. Cobb: He doesn't seem to know—
Mr. Dairy: A man so uncertain—
Mr. Twyce: Needs guiding about—
Mr. Cobb: A man in his shoes ought to wed—
Mr. Dairy: He'd earn the money—
Mr. Twyce: She'd do the shopping—
Mr. Cobb: And we'd get the trade.
Mr. Dairy: Now we have to wait on both—
Mr. Twyce: Twice instead of once—
Mr. Cobb: And keep other folk fidgeting—
Mr. Dairy: He never knows what he wants—
Mr. Twyce: She'd teach him what she wants—
Mr. Cobb: She goes straight to the apple—
Mr. Dairy: What's he doing now?—
Mr. Twyce: He's stopping at the butcher's—
Mr. Cobb: No, he's looking for some fish—
Mr. Dairy: Now he's 'twixt and then between.

[Mr. Tentative *is indeed 'twixt and be-*

tween MR. LAMB'S *shop and* MR. FINN'S. *He has grave recourse to an ancient stratagem for solving worldly riddles, the while he points from shop to shop.*]

MR. TENTATIVE: Eeenie, meenie, miney, mo—

MR. DAIRY: What he wants he'll never know—

MR. TENTATIVE: Catch a nigger by the toe—

MR. TWYCE: Till a daisy tell him so—

MR. TENTATIVE: If he hollers, let him go—

MR. COBB: He doesn't want the likes of me—

MR. DAIRY: Nor yours truly—

MR. TWYCE: Or sincerely—

MR. TENTATIVE: Eeenie, meenie, miney—

THE TRIO: No!

[*They vanish.* MR. TENTATIVE *is amazed, stares from side to side, grows dizzy, falls into a revery and soliloquizes.*]

MR. TENTATIVE: I might have known something would happen—each time I approach high noon—the riddle of fish or flesh—and invoke that tune to fiddle me out—some sudden disturbance is certain to force me to start all over again—I'll say it as fast as I can go—all in a breath to the end of it, so—Eeniemeeniemineymocatchaniggerbythetoeifhehollerslethimgoeeniemeenieminey— [MISS DAISY *suddenly appears.*] Oh! [*She comes serenely down the street. In his bewilderment,* MR. TENTATIVE *tries the fisherman first.*] Have you got a wishbone? [MR. FINN *shakes his head.* MR. TENTATIVE *tries the butcher.*] Have you got a fish-bone? [MR. LAMB *shakes his head.*] I don't know the right store from the wrong any more! Now, which of you has which?—

Mr. Finn: Chickens have wish-bones—
Mr. Lamb: Fishes have fish—
Mr. Finn: If you need the former, go there—
Mr. Lamb: If it's the latter, don't come here—
Mr. Tentative: But I want to make a wish—
Mr. Finn: Then you'd better not try fish—
[Miss Daisy *interposes, impatiently.*]
Miss Daisy: Good morning, gentlemen! [*The three men bow low. She bows to two of them.* Mr. Tentative *looks lugubrious.*] Have you—
Mr. Tentative: Have you—
Miss Daisy: Got any—
Mr. Tentative: Got any—
Miss Daisy: Fish?—
Mr. Tentative: Flesh?
[*Commotion.*]
Mr. Lamb: This way, man—
Miss Daisy: What kind have you got?
Mr. Tentative: What kind have you not?—
Mr. Finn: Everything outside of whales—
Mr. Lamb: Everything from snouts to tails—
Miss Daisy: I want a fish without bones—
Mr. Tentative: I want a wish without groans.
[*Consternation.*]
Mr. Finn: You might try an eel with a very long gullet—
Mr. Lamb: Here's a bone; now mind how you pull it—
Miss Daisy: Can that fool be chasing me?—
Mr. Lamb: Wait and see. [Mr. Lamb *holds out the wish-bone.* Mr. Tentative *grasps the other end and shuts his eyes tight.*] Ready?—
Mr. Tentative: I hope my wish comes true—

MR. LAMB: Steady!

[*They plant their feet firm and pull. The bone cracks.* MR. TENTATIVE *rolls over backward—against* MISS DAISY'S *boot—which pokes him aside. He rebounds excitedly.*]

MR. TENTATIVE: Which has which?—

MR. LAMB: You've got the longer—

MR. TENTATIVE: Ah, oh, oh, ah—

MR. LAMB: Hey—

MR. TENTATIVE: What's that you say?—

MR. LAMB: Stop and pay—

MR. TENTATIVE: Some other day.

[*He runs off jauntily, growing taller and taller.* MR. LAMB *brandishes a meat-ax and slams the door.*]

MR. FINN: It isn't every one who can buy and not pay—

MISS DAISY: What's that you say?—but he only bought a wish—

MR. FINN: But my neighbor lost a bone—

MISS DAISY: Does a butcher charge for bones?—

MR. FINN: Butchers do, though fishmen don't—

MISS DAISY: That man is not the fool he looks—

MR. FINN: He's worth hooking—

MISS DAISY: Sir?—

MR. FINN: I said cooking. [*She gazes thoughtfully down the street, and grows a little smaller.*] What can I do for you?—

MISS DAISY: Nothing—

MR. FINN. You said you'd like an eel?—

MISS DAISY: I didn't—

MR. FINN: Shrimp, smelt, sardine?—

Miss Daisy: No, not a thing—I've got to think this over—

Mr. Finn: Eh?—

Miss Daisy: Good day. [Mr. Finn *wags his head and vanishes. Looking smaller,* Miss Daisy *moves away doubtfully, sighs and soliloquizes.*] How did he do it?—such a nincompoop—have I ever done it?—maybe I'm the dupe? The butcher dissected that fowl, pulled out a bone—that man squeezed, made a wish, let out a howl, won his wish and seized it! And did you ever see such airs?—though I grow thinner, go without dinner, I'll solve such a state of affairs! [*Looking still taller,* Mr. Tentative *reappears, slyly wearing the bone as a monocle.*] Of all the impertinence! [Mr. Tentative *smirks.*] Is he smirking at me? [Mr. Tentative *ogles.*] Is he ogling me?—he's got the thing in his eye!

[Mr. Tentative *approaches, fairly bravely.* Miss Daisy *examines him from head to toe. He quails under the ordeal and takes the monocle out of one eye and tucks it into the other, where it greets* Miss Daisy's *glance returning from his toe to his head. She starts, twists about and then sails down the street. His monocle falls. She looks around. He lifts his hat. She lifts her nose and disappears.*]

Mr. Tentative [*solus*]: It seems I must have tried the wrong eye first—never any telling which way is worst—what good's a wish if it doesn't come true?—but if one doesn't work, why not try two? [*He stops in front of the florist's, but instead of summoning the owner reaches out and plucks a marguerite.*

And plucks the petals cautiously.] She loves me—she loves me not—does—not—does—not—could I stand on my head, would I see what's what?—skip a few noes—yes, yes, yes?—no—so it goes. The devil take a daisy—but what'll I do without her?—loneliness isn't easy—once you go longing about her? Why not try music—sigh in the moonlight—they like that, don't they?—fie, but they do. But where's the moon—and what'll I play?—I can't even manage a straw—so how can I sing what I'd say? I might practice all afternoon—give the moon a chance to rise—and attack her with a tune as soon as I'm a wee bit wise?

[*He stops at* Mr. Doodle's *little music shop. In fact, he is lured there by the sound of* Mr. Doodle's *voice—which causes him to improvise a caper. Plinka, planka, plink—if you try the minor, it'll be too sad. Planka, plunka, plank—if you try the major, it'll be too glad. Plinka, planka, plunka, plunk—try them both together, it won't be so bad.* Mr. Tentative *presses the button impetuously.* Mr. Doodle *bobs out.*]

Mr. Doodle: Well?—

Mr. Tentative: I want one—

Mr. Doodle: What?—

Mr. Tentative: The things you play—

Mr. Doodle: They're not things—

Mr. Tentative: What are they?—

Mr. Doodle: Lutes!—

Mr. Tentative: Ah!—

Mr. Doodle: Well?—

Mr. Tentative: Could I learn the strings?—

MR. DOODLE: Who can tell? [*He rubs his hands, hops into his shop and emerges with a deep-bellied lute, which he hangs about* MR. TENTATIVE'S *abdomen.*] There, now—your stomach will do—it rests well on you—

MR. TENTATIVE: But what do I do, and how?—

MR. DOODLE: Give your elbow lots of room—move your handle like a broom—sweep the strings and keep them busy—never stop when you are dizzy. [MR. TENTATIVE *tries—but he doesn't try well. His jangling dissonances bring various heads from shops and windows—likewise various missiles and refuse. He dodges from side to side, ecstatically strumming—and occasionally stooping and pocketing an appetizing morsel. Each time he dodges he edges farther away from* MR. DOODLE, *who calls frantically*—] Ten coins down and ten a month! [*Objects continue to fly, and* MR. TENTATIVE *to dodge, pluck and edge*—] Ten coins down and ten a week! [*More objects; more edging*—] Ten down and ten a day! [MR. TENTATIVE *vanishes. So does* MR. DOODLE, *after giving vent to some musical malediction like*—] Tympani of Satan; bass drums of Purgatory!

[*Silence. The street darkens gradually—and gradually* MISS DAISY *returns. Her destination seems uncertain for the first time. She halts between the milliner's and the tailor's.*]

MISS DAISY: Do I need a polkadot dress, or a hat with a bird in it?—it's ever so hard for a girl to guess and not look absurd in it. So what shall I choose the length of this street?—I'd like both of

my feet in natty, new shoes—a periwinkle blouse—suede gloves, snug and neat—a petticoat petite—a comb for my queues—ribbons in a noose—parasol for the heat—on an endless street, what *can* a girl choose? And what about my purse—there's the everlasting curse—one needs something more than wishing when it comes to window fishing. [*Sighs, turns her purse upside down. One tiny coin rolls out.*] Oh, now how shall I begin—one won't even buy a pin. [*Shakes the purse. Nothing happens. Looks inside, drops a tear in the purse and shuts it. Disconsolately picks up the coin and despairingly taps it at the bootshop. No answer. At the tailor's. No answer. At the milliner's. No answer.*] Can it be I'm too late? Can't I beg, can't I borrow? What a sorrowful fate—must I wait till to-morrow?

[*The moon looms up behind her, shakes his head and winks. There is nothing for it but to amble home again—which* Miss Daisy *does. She lives up at the head of the street—a fact the moon discloses. Looking very small, she vanishes. Pause. The moon frowns, scratches his head, stops scratching and smiles.* Mr. Tentative, *looking very tall but very grave, appears—with a major planka-plunk. The moon hides behind a cloud.* Mr. Tentative *essays a minor plinka-plank. Whether it is the cloud or moon that moves, the latter appears again—but his eyes are closed impersonally.* Mr. Tentative *alternates the major and minor, stations himself below* Miss Daisy's *casement*

and clears his throat. Her window opens magically. This renders MR. TENTATIVE *speechless. But he is shrewd enough to ask himself—"Is singing necessary?" The moon shakes his head. "Is playing sufficient?" The moon nods. "So much the better!" cries* MR. TENTATIVE *and tries a bolder conjunction of tones. The little street door below opens like a cuckoo-clock. But nothing comes out. No. So* MR. TENTATIVE *goes in—though he has to stoop to manage it. The steeple chimes rapidly four times—in the manner of an old monosyllabic question—with accents on the first and third beats—and hesitates. A single long soft echo responds. The moon winks. So does* TATTLE, *the newsboy, who is blind of one eye. He comes scampering down the street with—*]

Extra—something extra—before you go to sleep—extraordinary—penny a paper—penny a peep!

[*Sleepy heads emerge from shop-doors. The six shopkeepers drone in a broken chorus—*]

What is it, what is it?

[TATTLE *accepts a drowsy coin for each lively paper—and scampers off. Each shopkeeper shuts one eye and reads with the other.*]

MR. DAIRY: I thought so—

MR. TWYCE: So did I—

MR. COBB: I might have known—

MR. FINN: So might I—

MR. LAMB: I could have told you—

MR. DOODLE: So could I.

MR. DAIRY: 'Twas a good day's work—

THE OTHERS: A good day's work.
MR. DAIRY: I started it—
MR. TWYCE: Continued it—
MR. COBB: Encouraged it—
MR. FINN: Discouraged it—
MR. LAMB: Prolonged it—
MR. DOODLE: Concluded it.
MR. DAIRY: Good night—
THE OTHERS: Good night.

[*They stretch themselves and yawn. The moon winks. Beginning with* MR. DAIRY'S, *each open eye closes in sequence. Each shopkeeper vanishes in sequence. Each door closes in sequence. The moon yawns. A second cloud, crossing the moon, provides the final*

CURTAIN

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

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THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

by

STARK YOUNG

CHARACTERS

ADELLE
AUVERGNE
GAWAIN
A SISTER OF MERCY
A DOCTOR

TIME: *Sunset*
PLACE: *The King's Harem*

SCENE I: *A Gothic chamber, spacious and shadowy. And through the long, heavy curtains of the windows at the back the country appears, vague, wide, stretching into the mist and broken here and there with rocky cliffs. A dull sunset, almost imperceptible, shows in the western sky beyond. The sound of water in the coves rises from far below and mingles with the wind. The curtains move faintly now and then. It is the King's Harem and the walls are fantastically spotted with pictures of women, prints, paintings and magazine covers, in many styles. On the table and*

over the floor lie a number of pictures cut in two. At the side before a window that looks out on a gray, northern sky, AUVERGNE *stands dressed as King Solomon in state, with a long, flowing mantle of reddish purple and a crown of faded gilt. On the opposite side of the room, by a door at the back, stands* GAWAIN, *in a servile attitude, almost curlike. A* SISTER OF MERCY *and the* DOCTOR *stand near the windows at the back, watching.*

SISTER: You must wait, Doctor. Sometimes he will not speak for hours together but will stand there dressed as you see in the long mantle listening like that. Last week the old physician went away and we have sent for you.

DOCTOR: Has he been long in this madness?

SISTER: His father brought him here ten years ago. Since then his father and mother are dead.

DOCTOR: And where is the other one?

SISTER: She will be coming in now any minute.

DOCTOR: He is going to speak now—mark—

[AUVERGNE *turns to* GAWAIN.]

AUVERGNE:

That thou, Wales, mayst enter here we grant;
But thou mayst not draw near unto our person.
For ranged with ours, thy lineage is humble;
William the Norman, thy first ancestor,
Though Lord of Britain was meanwhile the son
Of a low peasant woman. Therefore thou,
Not through thy father's nor thine own desert,
Mayst look upon our face in presence here,

But through our courtesy.

GAWAIN: La, I know well the dead leaves fall.

[AUVERGNE *turns again to the window.*]

DOCTOR: It is a strange sickness. What is it he thinks, who is he?

SISTER: He thinks he is King Solomon and the other the Prince of Wales. And Adelle, the Queen of Sheba.

DOCTOR: She is his cousin?

SISTER: His father would not let them wed because they were cousins and there was already enough madness. Auvergne grew mad first.

DOCTOR: And when did they conceive her so?

SISTER: He had been calling after her, and when she came he thought that she had come up out of Sheba.

AUVERGNE [*without looking round*]:

Here, thou, go bear this word:
The Queen of Sheba is most welcome.

[GAWAIN *shambles out.*]

DOCTOR: And this is his court?

SISTER: This is the King's Harem. You see his wives on the walls. He will sit sometimes cutting these pictures all day. Them that displease him he beheads. You will see them lying on the floor.

DOCTOR: I have never seen a madness like it. These are not common souls. I will observe them humbly.

SISTER: Ten years and they are still the same. But I am not the same. Is it not bitter how these two remain as they were always, while I, who am not mad, grow old and tired?

DOCTOR: It will be different for them but will come. They will not grow old as we do, counting the days

of life, but only as colors fade. They have the freedom the soul dreams and shudders at. For what the soul most dreams it fears most.

SISTER: I have learned that.

DOCTOR: And they will not dwindle and grow stale and die like us, but only cease, losing their passion and splendor as the light fades from clouds.

SISTER: Sometimes she will be quiet as death all day and will not speak but hold her hand to her brow thus, as if she would remember something again.

DOCTOR: When was this?

SISTER: Now and then always, but oftener of late.

DOCTOR: And she has got her reason back?

SISTER: Never, never once. Or what would she do then?

DOCTOR: She would be well again if the change held.

SISTER: And what would he do if she were taken from him! I cannot pray for that, doctor, I have seen them too long like this together.

DOCTOR: What will she do now, will she come?

SISTER: She will come in by that door and go to him. You will see—look—

[The door is reopened and ADELLE *enters. She wears a torn veil and glitters with ornaments. In her hand she carries an old wreath of wax flowers and with it a cluster of faded roses.* GAWAIN *follows her and takes his former place by the door at the back.]*

DOCTOR: Look at her eyes, she is more terrible than he.

SISTER: He will speak now—

AUVERGNE: Who is she that looketh forth as the morning?

ADELLE:

I am a rose of Sharon,
A lily of the valleys.

AUVERGNE:

As a lily among thorns
So art thou among the daughters.

ADELLE:

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood
So art thou among the sons.

AUVERGNE:

There are threescore queens
And fourscore concubines
And virgins without number,
But thou art one.

SISTER: How beautiful they are!

DOCTOR: Listen—

ADELLE:

From mine own far-off realm I come, O King,
For marvel of thy name.

AUVERGNE:

Soft is thy voice as when the twilight falls
On Lebanon, and the dove calls.

ADELLE:

Weary my feet and weary my starved eyes
For sight of thee, Beloved.

SISTER: How the wind rushes on the moorland!

AUVERGNE:

Sweeter than honey from the cedar wood
Thy coming is, fairer than stars thy sight;
Yet to me thou hast been strange,
Thou hast been very strange and far away;

Though I have half forgot.

ADELLE:

I do not know how it was;
Or why I should talk of it, and yet I must.
Suddenly another stood in my place here
And looked on thee and was afraid,
Finding thee strange and far away,
And all thy glory hideous.
And something horrible was there and there—
And something that came there and there
And would not leave me.

AUVERGNE:

Now I remember.
But then—?

ADELLE:

Then once again I saw thee as thou art,
Even as thou standest here.

AUVERGNE:

That time I lost thee was the world
A darkness and a night.
For there is no other love but thee.
But that is gone, why will you think of it?
Why will you bring in sorrow?

ADELLE:

I do not think I am well. Behind mine eyes
The fire and ice again.—Give me your hand!

SISTER: Do you see the flowers? Every day she will come like this and bring these flowers.

ADELLE: Now it is gone.

AUVERGNE: It is past.

ADELLE:

Behold, my lord,
Here I have brought thee flowers from the vale,

Little blue lilies from the waterbrooks,
And roses drowned with dew; and mingled here
Are petals all of wax, which I have done,
Weaving therein the summer of my love.

AUVERGNE: Star of the South, we render thanks to thee.

ADELLE:

Perfect are they, most perfect each to each,
As are our loves. Then wilt thou not, O King,
Make trial of thy wisdom? Which is wax,
And which the rain and sun?

[AUVERGNE *goes to the window and opens it.*]

AUVERGNE:

Come hither, tiny arbiters of the air,
Winged seekers of God's sweetness through the world,
And solve my riddle!

ADELLE: Look, the clouds break! The Sun, O King!

[ADELLE *stands by the window and lets the sun flood over her.*]

AUVERGNE: The sun?
Behold they settle where the rose is sweet.
Did I not know? Look how the bees have judged.
Alas, that in this world men know not true from false.
I know it not, though I am king.
Why wilt thou not turn and look?

[*Suddenly* ADELLE *tears away her veil and shrieks.*]

AUVERGNE: What ails my queen?

ADELLE: Oh! Oh! Oh!

AUVERGNE: Hath the sun maddened thee?
ADELLE: Oh God!
AUVERGNE: Who are you, looking at me with such eyes?
ADELLE:
Sister, where are you?
There is some one walking in my brain
To drive me out.
I do not know who she is, O, God!—
AUVERGNE: Who is she?
ADELLE: Oh, do not touch me!
SISTER: Daughter—
ADELLE: Save me, O God, save me!
SISTER: I am with you, what do you see?
ADELLE:
A cloud passed from the earth. Look, look,
And tell me am I mad? Or is it he that's mad?
Is he not my cousin there, Auvergne?
DOCTOR: Speak to her now, hold her if you can.
SISTER: It is Auvergne. Come away, come away, child!
ADELLE:
Is he not Gawain, sobbing by the door?
Whose face is like a beast's.
[GAWAIN *wails as he crouches by the door.*]
AUVERGNE:
Silence thy crying in our court, thou dog!
Who is this woman glowering at me
That rends our court with noise?
SISTER: Will you not come with me?
ADELLE:
Look where his eyes burn!
Do not come near me!

SISTER: You need not fear him. Give me the veil!

ADELLE:

Oh, God, I see at last,
Thou hast shriven me from what I was.
O horrible, most horrible,
Look! Auvergne!

AUVERGNE: Who are you that look on me like that?
And who has taken my Beloved from me?

ADELLE: Auvergne! Auvergne!

AUVERGNE:

Depart out of my sight, give place, give place,
Lest I should drive ye forth!

SISTER: Come—

[ADELLE *and the* SISTER *hasten out, the* DOCTOR *following them.* GAWAIN *runs out in fear.* AUVERGNE *turns from them and suddenly falls on his knees by the window, beating his breast.*]

AUVERGNE:

Hear me, O God, alone I turn to thee!
Let not the honor of thy servant fail;
Let not my glory nor my kingdom pass!
What is that face upon the wind, O God?
Whither is my Beloved fled, oh, whither?

SCENE II: *Seven days have passed. It is night, and the windows are dark. Outside the wind moans and eddies, and brings the sound of water and of bells far off. The flames of the candles in the chamber burn steady and straight.* AUVERGNE *lies propped on his pillow, his eyes closed. At the back* GAWAIN *crouches against the wall, hold-*

ing an old lute and muttering to himself. ADELLE *and the sister attendant stand watching at the bedside.*

DOCTOR: I have watched until I have no more strength. I will go now, and it is time, for this sickness spreads into my soul. I cannot keep in my science, nor take this as a mere madness, when there is so much beauty and sorrow and glory.

SISTER: What shall I do?

DOCTOR: What I have counselled if a right moment comes for it, but not till then.

SISTER: I will see to it. If a right moment comes.

DOCTOR: And so good-night.

SISTER: Good-night, Doctor.

[*The* DOCTOR *goes out.*]

ADELLE:

Alas, he hath lain so these seven days,
Shattered and moaning, and his weary heart
Stolen from him into the vales of Sheba.

SISTER: How perfect this shadow is to him!

ADELLE:

I will not think that there are any shadows
Nor any images that are all vain;
But they and life are one.

SISTER: God doeth all things well.

ADELLE:

How should I know this God any more
Who set me in darkness!
How should I see him now save as an image
Shadowed, blurred, like all things to me?

SISTER: Hush, child, thou speakest rashly, for God hath spared thee.

ADELLE:

Why should He spare me and leave this man?
I have been spared and I know now what I was,
But I know also what it is to be like him.
Is it not cruel
That what is beautiful can yet live on,
A man's heart and courage and dreams
And his soul's magnificent love,
Be living still when he is worse than dead,
Because his dead feet walk not in life!

SISTER: He hath had his joys also, for God evens the scales of life.

ADELLE:

It were less cruel and more just
To be like Gawain there,
Who has no more lived than a dog,
But came into the world dead.

SISTER: No! No!

ADELLE:

Better than what Auvergne has been.
How is it just
To shut him from man's life
But leave him the imagination and the pain?
Look how he lifts his hands,
They are too white.
I cannot bear to see him lift his hands like that.

SISTER: I have seen him often do it in his sleep.

ADELLE:

And where am I,
Who love his soul's height and sorrow,
That are the same in him even now as ever
But yet are made vain and lost?
Where should I be but lost?

[*At the back* GAWAIN *strikes his strings.*]

GAWAIN: Shall not the glow-worm light my chamber then?

[*Sings.*]

His shadow moveth to his grave,
Kneel where he lies, ladie;
His cold lips kiss the ear of death,
Close down his eyes, ladie.

ADELLE:

Where did he find this song?
There are old things like it,
But who makes songs out of death and madness now?

SISTER: You wrote it down for him, child, once, let it be.

ADELLE: I wrote it once?

SISTER: You must not turn so pale, that time is past.

GAWAIN:

Let them not fall!
There are leaves, there are black leaves falling
Down through the air upon his bed.

[*The* SISTER *goes and touches his arm.*]

SISTER: Hush, thy cousin lies dying.

[*The strings stop.*]

GAWAIN: Can we not light more candles?

SISTER: It is light here. The night is outside.

GAWAIN:

Sister, beyond the window, look, oh, look.
I see the souls of men shuddering in darkness.

SISTER: He has opened his eyes.

GAWAIN: I will play again.

[*He begins again to play on the strings and does not leave off.*]

SISTER: There—!

AUVERGNE:

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning?
The rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys?
My Beloved is gone from me, and hath departed.
As a lily among thorns, so was my love
Among the daughters. Oh, return, return,
That I may look upon thee!

ADELLE: Alas, canst thou not sleep?

AUVERGNE: The glory of my court is gone.

ADELLE:

Auvergne, Auvergne, Auvergne, thou hast dreamed,
Cousin, thou hast but dreamed.

AUVERGNE:

There are threescore queens and virgins without number.
But she is one. Seest thou not there
The women dead for my Beloved's sake?

ADELLE:

I see but pictures you have cut, Auvergne.
There are no dead women here.

AUVERGNE:

My Beloved is mine till the day break
And the shadows flee away.
Oh, return, return, that I may look upon thee!

ADELLE: Can naught be done?

SISTER: Nothing.

AUVERGNE:

Send me mine end, O God, weary am I,
Weary and most weary of my realm!

ADELLE: Oh, is there nothing?

SISTER: Nothing.

ADELLE:

O, God, I hear in the dark
The feet of all the women I have been,
Where shall I turn?

AUVERGNE:

Wilt thou not come again! The stars are set,
And the day is breaking,
Wilt thou not come again!

ADELLE:

Spare me, O God, spare me, O God!
Let me be mad again,
Cast me out again, O God,
For I have killed him!

SISTER: No, do not curse yourself, you have not killed him.

AUVERGNE:

Day after day, and weary years are come.
But not my love.

ADELLE: Show me, O God, how I may come to him!

SISTER: Take down your hands from your face; do not weep, and I will tell you what I think.

ADELLE: What do you think?

SISTER: That you might come again to him wearing the veil, put on again the queen's garments—perhaps—no, no, do not look at me like that! It is only a fancy; I had it from the doctor, but it is idle.

ADELLE: How should the doctor know, he has done nothing?

SISTER: Nothing. It is all idle.

ADELLE:

Oh, never, never!
I could be mad, O God, or I could die for him,

But what would it be to put madness on again
When I am well,
And to go back—O God, I cannot!

SISTER: Do not heed me, child, I have forgot—

ADELLE: Not that! Not that!

AUVERGNE:

What is my sin, O Lord, that thou hast sent
This sorrow on me?
Alas, forever and forever!
The wind lifts the leaves in the court,
But I am shaken with your stillness,
O Beloved!

SISTER:

Pardon, oh, pardon! You must not stand like that
Looking at me and seeing nothing.
Speak to me! It is past!
Come then with me, see, I take your hand,
You can do nothing here.
See, I take your hand.

ADELLE: Tell him she cometh.

SISTER: Oh, no, no, no, no, you shall not do it!

AUVERGNE:

Thine eyes were like the fishpools of Heshbon,
And I leaned down and looked therein.
I heard the bird at night sing,
And I saw the darkness on the wall.
All the night through I lifted up my hands,
But they are empty, for thou art gone forever.

ADELLE:

O King, O Solomon, hear me, even now there is word!
She cometh out of Sheba.

SISTER: Oh, no, no!

AUVERGNE:

Open the gates that she may enter in.
Go forth quickly that ye may bring her,
Open the gates to my Beloved.

[ADELLE *goes out.*]

Look forth, Beloved, on Jerusalem,
Lo, where the towers and the gilded spires
Make lightnings of the moon, and the night lies
Softer than sleep upon the town.
A star is in the west, sinking; but thou art mine.
As the moon amid the fading stars art thou
Among the daughters, O Beloved.

GAWAIN: The floor of the pool is dark under the water.

SISTER: His eyes are glassed with death already.

[ADELLE *enters with the veil and wreath. She falls on her knees beside him, and beats her breast.*]

ADELLE: Here, here am I, here, here beside thee, Sheba!

SISTER: His eyes move not. What a wind there is to-night!

ADELLE:

What have I done? I cannot bear it.
How should one dare
To be one thing and then another?
Let me be mad in truth, O God!
Let me not know what I sh[illegible] know!

GAWAIN [*breaking into a lau[illegible]*]: What is it blows to the sea?

SISTER: Hush, Gawain!

GAWAIN:

The little hand flutters on the strings,
The little light flickers on the wave.

ADELLE: Lo, I am come, O King, the Queen of Sheba.

SISTER: We are too late. Take off the veil.

AUVERGNE:

Mark, how the trumpets blow about the walls.
I will go out to meet my love,
I will go out to her beyond the gates.

[*The* SISTER *holds up her hand to* GAWAIN *and drops to her knees. The music stops.*]

ADELLE [*crying out to him*]:

If I shall call thee!
Auvergne, Prince, King, Beloved—!

SISTER: He will not hear you. His eyes are set.

[ADELLE *draws the veil from her and stands looking down at him.*]

AUVERGNE:

Till the day break and the shadows flee away,
Oh, return, return, that I may look upon thee.

CURTAIN

THE AUTOCRAT OF THE COFFEE-STALL

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THE AUTOCRAT OF THE COFFEE-STALL

by

Harold Chapin

CHARACTERS

Keeper of the Coffee-Stall
Bert
Small Man
The Autocrat
Sam
Alf
Sedly

Time: *Midnight in November.*
Place: *The corner of a wide thoroughfare near Victoria Station.*

Scene: *A large, well equipped coffee-stall stands just L. of C. facing audience, with a slight turn to the Right. A foot from its L. end is a lamp-post which illuminates a vivid patch of light from off L. to half way R. to C. The warm amber light from the coffee-stall lamps blends with it just in front. There is no other lighting of any sort, the R. wings and back cloth being out of the patch of light are consequently lost in dark-*

ness. There is the massive corner of a building L. with an exit below it.

The idea is that a pavement runs from up R. to down L., the coffee-stall being in the road at the curbside, and the lamp-post on the curb.

There are three men at the counter of the stall. Two—of the street fruit seller, or Covent Garden Porter type—are at the R. end, and another—a bowler-hatted and shabby-coated little man with a wan face and a large nose—is cracking the shell off a hard boiled egg at the other.

The coffee-stall keeper is drawing a cup of coffee from the well-polished urn at the R. end of counter as the curtain rises. He is a stout, well-to-do man of his class, with clean white shirt-sleeves rolled above his elbows and a capacious red waistcoat decorated with a large watch and chain. His hair is dark and short and well oiled down, and his cheeks and forehead are large and also highly polished. He places the coffee before one of the two men at R. end of stall.

KEEPER: There y'are, Bert. Now you're satisfied.

[*The man addressed takes the cup. He is a surly-looking man with a chewed mustache and an air of general dissatisfaction.*]

BERT [*with sarcasm*]: Am I?

KEEPER: Wot do you mean by "Am I"? You blooming well ought to be.

BERT [*in the same tone*]: Ought I?
KEEPER: Yus, you ought. You've got wot you arsked for.
BERT: 'Ave I?
KEEPER [*incensed*]: Yus, you 'ave.
BERT: No, I 'aven't. I arst you for *two sardines.*
KEEPER [*with great firmness*]: I'm not goin' to open another box of sardines to-night, my lad, so don't you think it.

[BERT *grumbles to his companion over his coffee. The small man hails the* KEEPER *in a high tone of scientific inquiry.*]

SMALL MAN: Guv'ner, what *is* this you've gimme?
KEEPER [*warningly, without moving*]: That? That's an egg. What did you think it was?
SMALL MAN: Oh, I thought it was an egg, too—w'en I see it in the distance. But it ses otherwise!
KEEPER [*nettled*]: What d'you mean?
SMALL MAN [*with sweet seriousness*]: It's been singing me a little 'ymn wot I 'aven't 'eard since I was a nipper.
KEEPER: None o' your larks. Give it 'ere.

[*Moves to L. of stall.*]

SMALL MAN [*addressing egg*]: Go to poppa. [*Looking up.*] It ses you're a nasty, cruel man, and it doesn't want to leave me.
KEEPER: If you've any complaint to make, 'and it over.
SMALL MAN: It's the egg wot's doin' the complainin'.

[*The humorist obeys.*]

KEEPER [*after sniffing at the egg in the professional*

manner; with the utmost conviction]: That's a perfectly good egg.

SMALL MAN [*very seriously*]: You surprise me.

KEEPER: Look 'ere—

SMALL MAN: Just shows yer 'ow 'ard it is to judge, doesn't it?

[*The* KEEPER *takes another egg from the shelf and puts it down on the counter with considerable dignity.*]

KEEPER: There. [*Putting offending egg aside.*] I'll eat it myself w'en I gets 'ungry.

SMALL MAN: You'll 'ave to be *very* 'ungry. [*The* KEEPER *dashes ponderously through the stall door which is at the L. end—in pursuit of the humorist, who dodges away to a safe distance. Dancing about.*] Daddy can't catch me.

[*He knocks into* BERT.]

BERT [*angrily*]: 'Ere. Don't come bargin' into me.

SMALL MAN: Sorry.

[*The* KEEPER *gives up the chase and reënters his stall in response to a rapping on the counter by* BERT. *The* SMALL MAN *returns to his end of the counter.*]

BERT: Chuck playin' wi' the kid, and gi's a bit o' seed cake.

[*The* KEEPER *complies. A man enters up R. and paces slowly along pavement towards stall. He is a tall, thin man in a long, dirty tweed greatcoat, with an exceedingly dirty white muffler around his neck. He wears a tweed traveling cap with the ear-flaps tied up on top, and a peak behind as well as in*

front. His hands are deep in his pockets, from one of which a whangee cane—very bent and ragged at the end—sticks up. He looks about fifty-five to sixty years of age, and wears a ragged military mustache of rather generous dimensions which is a mixture of sandy and gray. His clothes, though very shabby and dirty, are well made, and his boots are good. He walks slowly and very erect, with the leisured air of an officer going the rounds. The customers at the coffee-stall are apprised of his approach by the SMALL MAN.]

SMALL MAN: 'Ere 'e is.

[BERT *and his friend turn and all three involuntarily draw themselves up and lower their voices. The newcomer stops about a yard from the stall with his back to the audience and nods to them. His manner is intensely autocratic.*]

KEEPER [*with the polite familiarity of a good waiter*]: Breakfast, sir?

[*The* AUTOCRAT *moves to the center of the counter and rests his left arm against it, facing L. with his back three-quarters to the audience.*]

AUTOCRAT: Thenk ye.

[*He speaks in a gruff, measured voice, with a certain huskiness and rattle which occasionally develop into a fit of coughing. His nationality is unmistakably Scottish.*]

BERT [*whispering to his friend*]: Always calls it

'is breakfast. Don't believe 'e gets up till nigh on midnight.

[BERT'S *friend*—SAM *by name*—*gazes at the* AUTOCRAT'S *back with great interest.*]

SAM: Gow on!!

BERT: Fact.

[*The* AUTOCRAT *stands quietly waiting for his coffee, unconscious of their existence. The* SMALL MAN *plucks up courage to address him.*]

SMALL MAN [*with great courtesy*]: Can I offer you a cigarette?

AUTOCRAT [*taking a woodbine from the packet held out to him*]: Thenk ye. [*His coffee is placed before him.*] I'll trouble ye for a match.

KEEPER [*supplying match smartly*]: Anything to eat, sir?

AUTOCRAT [*after lighting cigarette slowly*]: Aye. I'll take a sardine an' some bread an' butter.

KEEPER [*rapidly producing tin and tin opener and falling to briskly*]: Right, sir.

BERT [*annoyed*]: 'Ullo! I thought you wouldn't open another box to-night.

KEEPER [*quietly*]: I've changed me mind.

BERT: I notice you wouldn't do it to oblige *me*—

KEEPER [*bending back lid of tin*]: I'm obligin' meself. You can 'ave some now if you like.

BERT: Can I? After me seed cake? [*With sarcasm.*] Thanks.

[*The* KEEPER *serves the* AUTOCRAT'S *sardine and bread and butter.*]

AUTOCRAT: What's the matter?

KEEPER: Nothin', sir. I sed something about not

opening another box to-night—just by way of a joke.

AUTOCRAT [*seriously*]: A joke?

KEEPER: Yes.

AUTOCRAT [*grimly*]: Well, mebbe I'm defeecient in humor. [*Dissecting his sardine methodically.*] I'm obliged to ye for opening the tin for me—especially as I'm no' going to pay ye the nicht.

KEEPER: Oh, that's all right, sir.

[*The* AUTOCRAT *continues eating and smoking alternately.*]

BERT [*to his friend*]: 'Ear that, Sam?

SAM: Wot?

[BERT *indicates the* AUTOCRAT *with a gesture of his head and whispers into* SAM'S *ear.*]

SAM: Gow on!

KEEPER: I'm glad to see you eatin' again, Sir.

AUTOCRAT: Aye. My appetite's no' been very guid lately.

KEEPER: Your cough don't seem to get any worse.

AUTOCRAT: I'm doubtful if it could.

[*Chuckles grimly.*]

KEEPER: We must 'ope for a short winter.

SMALL MAN [*entering conversation*]: We can't grumble at to-night, sir.

AUTOCRAT: I'm no' likely to grumble.

SMALL MAN: You gets it pretty cold in Scotland, I suppose, sir?

AUTOCRAT: In Scotland? Oh, aye. [*With a twinkle.*] What makes ye mention Scotland, noo?

SMALL MAN [*very nervously*]: I—thought per'aps, —you might 'a' been there, sir.

AUTOCRAT [*chuckling*]: You cou'd na' by any chance 'a' guessed that I was Scottish?

SMALL MAN [*slightly reassured*]: Well, I thought it just possible you might be, sir.

AUTOCRAT: Juist possible? Aye, it's juist possible I am. Ye'd not take me for anything else but Scottish, noo, would ye?

SMALL MAN: Not easily, sir.

AUTOCRAT: Thenk ye.

[*Shakes him seriously by the hand.*]

KEEPER: Been Norf lately, sir?

AUTOCRAT [*quietly*]: No' for twenty years—except for ten days before the war.

SMALL MAN: The last war, sir?

AUTOCRAT [*catching up the phrase bitterly*]: The last war? Aye, the last war I'll ever see.

BERT [*chiming in*]: Ah! That's what they all say.

AUTOCRAT [*turning sharply*]: That's what who all say, may I ask, sir?

BERT: Pretty well all the chaps what was in it. I know a few.

SAM: So do I. My brother-in-law, wot works at the Standard—'e ses as old England can get along wivout 'im next time.

AUTOCRAT: Then he's a coward, sir. We may grumble, but if the word came—we'd go out again to-morrow.

SAM: Oh, rats!

AUTOCRAT [*dangerously*]: What did you say to me, sir?

SAM: I said rats.

AUTOCRAT [*rating him soundly and effectively*]: You're an ill-bred young pup, sir! A dirty young pup, sir! Wash your neck, sir! Put your feet down flat on the ground, sir! Shave that mess off

your lip, sir, and try to grow a mustache, and don't presume to address me again until you have learnt to be civil.

SAM [*crushed and amazed*]: Gawd's truth!

AUTOCRAT [*turning his back squarely upon him and resuming his conversation with the startled* SMALL MAN]: What were we talking about?

[*The* SMALL MAN *stammers for a moment over the reply.*]

SAM [*aside to* BERT]: Did you ever 'ear anything like 'im?

BERT: Shut up and—

SMALL MAN [*still quailing under the* AUTOCRAT'S *angry gaze*]: Scotland, I think, sir.

AUTOCRAT: Oh, aye.

KEEPER [*trying to regain calm*]: It's a fine country, sir. Glasgow's a fine city. I've got some picture pos' cards of it. It's a rising city.

AUTOCRAT [*coldly*]: Aye. So I've heard—commercially.

KEEPER: You don't 'appen to 'ave been there?

AUTOCRAT: No.

SMALL MAN: It's a great *Liberal* country, ain't it, sir?

AUTOCRAT: The world's all Liberal these days. Too Liberal—to its enemies.

BERT [*aggressively*]: Oh? Oo told you so?

AUTOCRAT [*turning again*]: I beg your pardon?

BERT: Oo told you as we was too liberal to our enemies?

KEEPER: I don't want no politics 'ere, so—

BERT: Well, 'e began it.

AUTOCRAT: I didna think my remark was addressed to you, but I'll tell ye. The War told me.

BERT [*under his breath*]: Good old War!

KEEPER [*hastening to cover* BERT's *remark*]: You'll mean the Boer War, sir?

AUTOCRAT: Aye. Ye've mebbe heard me say that I was through it.

KEEPER [*as before*]: You may 'ave 'appened to mention it, sir.

AUTOCRAT: Well, gentlemen. The Boer War. What was it?

BERT: A bloomin' expense.

SMALL MAN: 'Ear, 'ear!

AUTOCRAT: Ye're richt, sir. An' why? Because it was conducted on Liberal principles.

SAM: There was a Conservative government—

AUTOCRAT: I'm no' talkin' of Gover'ments, or Parties, sir. The World's a' Liberal, these days. Whiggish, if ye know the meaning of the worrd. Saft, an' orderly, an' civil.

SMALL MAN: I don't see much 'arm in bein' civil.

AUTOCRAT [*scornfully*]: Perhaps ye love the Police for the same reason.

SMALL MAN: What 'ave the Police got to do with civility?

AUTOCRAT: They are the civil authorities, are they not? They keep men saft an' orderly.

SMALL MAN [*meekly*]: I'm afraid I don't quite follow you.

AUTOCRAT: I say the Police are the civil authority, aren't they?

SMALL MAN: Not to me.

AUTOCRAT: Ye're mixing up civility an' courtesy,

my friend. They're no' the same thing. You can take it from me the police constitute the civil authority.

Small Man [*unconvinced*]: All right.

Autocrat: And what is Liberalism based on?

Small Man [*completely nonplussed*]: Gawd knows.

Autocrat: I'll tell ye, sir. It's based on Civil Authority. Which means that any little whipper-snapper can call himself my equal an' run to a Policeman when I set oot to prove to him he's no'. Liberalism is Policemanism. What did I ask ye first? I asked ye: What was the Boer War. I'll tell ye the answer. It was a Policeman's war. We weren't sent oot as fighters to show the Boers who was right, but as Policemen to round them up and keep them in order and see that they behaved themselves,—an' as soon as they'd promised—bound themselves over—to do so we came away home again an' asked for our pay. We were Policemen. Aye, and we had other Policemen over us to see that we—

[*His excited speech terminates in a burst of uncontrollable coughing during which the others keep an uncomfortable silence.*]

Small Man: After all—you know—War is only telling the other chap to toe the line, and if he doesn't, bloomin' well making him.

Autocrat: You're wrong, sir! War is Nature's plan for making Men and Nations great by giving life to the strong, and death to the weak.

Bert [*shocked*]: 'Struth.

Autocrat: Yes, sir. But there'll be no more war. Ye can't get War from paid troops. Policemen,

that's all they are. Our ancestors made war, sir. They fought for spoils. The spoils to the strong. That's part o' the plan. Every man in an invading force should provide for himself from the country. If he provides well, so much the better for himself, and so much the worse for the country. That would be war, sir. Prosecuted with all the vigor of man.

BERT: You'd be prosecuted if you tried it.

AUTOCRAT: What did you say, sir?

KEEPER [*gently*]: Quarter past twelve, sir.

AUTOCRAT [*stopping abruptly and turning*]: Eh?

KEEPER: Quarter past twelve.

AUTOCRAT: Thenk ye. [*Drains coffee-cup.*] Disgraceful, closing pubs in a free country.

[*Strides off hastily down L. There is a moment's pause after he has left. Then the* SMALL MAN, *catching the* KEEPER'S *eye, voices the general sentiment.*]

SMALL MAN: 'E's a rum 'un, ain't 'e?

KEEPER: 'E's alright. Bit nutty, that's all.

BERT [*angrily*]: Bit nutty? 'E's bloomin' well up the pole in a sailor suit, an' can't get down for splinters.

SAM: 'Oo is 'e?

BERT: Wot? 'Aven't you never met 'im before?

SAM: Not that I knows of.

BERT [*ironically*]: O, 'e's quite one o' the sights. W'ere d's'e live, George?

KEEPER: Down Millbank—w'ere they're pullin' the old 'ouses down. 'E comes along 'ere every night about this time an' 'as a bite. Calls it 'is breakfast.

SMALL MAN: Doesn't seem to ever 'ave anything else, much, does 'e?

KEEPER: 'E goes an' 'as a drop at the Crown before they close.

BERT: Wot I wants to know is:—'ow can 'e go gargling at the Crown w'en 'e can't afford to pay you for 'is cawfee?

KEEPER: 'E must put aside something for it. Poor old chap, it don't take much to make 'im tuppence-on-the-can. I think 'is 'ead's a bit weak.

SMALL MAN: Must be a great savin', 'avin' a weak 'ead.

SAM: Old soldier, ain't 'e?

BERT: In 'is mind.

SAM: Ain't 'e really?

BERT [*very scornfully*]: Naow.

SAM: Gow on!

KEEPER: Of course 'e is. Any one can see it.

BERT: Don't be silly. Didn't you 'ear 'im say 'e'd go out again?

KEEPER [*tolerantly*]: 'E's a bit cracked, that's all. 'E didn't mean it.

SAM: You ought to 'ear my brother-in-law on the subject. W'y 'e lost the stoppin' out of three teef along o' the 'ard biscuits, an' 'e's never got the plum pudden' wot we posted out to 'im yet. You ought to 'ear 'im on soldierin'. Mugs game, 'e calls it.

BERT: So it is.

KEEPER [*quietly*]: Old Scotty's been in the army right enough, Bert, don't you worry.

BERT: I notice 'e don't mention wot regiment 'e belonged to.

SMALL MAN [*excitedly*]: Yes, 'e does. Only the other night w'en 'e was a bit blindo. Second Battalion Keelshire—you know—Scott's Buffs.

SAM [*raising his voice in surprise and ecstasy*]: Wot? Oh, nah 'e's done it! Nah we 'ave got 'im! W'y my bruvver-in-law was in that very regiment —Second Battalion, too, an' 'e ses as there wasn't a Scotchman in the 'ole battalion except the Colonel.

BERT: There, I told you so.

KEEPER: Your brother-in-law couldn't 'ave known every man in the Battalion. Why, that's nigh a thousand men, isn't it?

SAM: Somethink like it. But every one mentioned it. It was one of 'is regular jokes in 'is letters 'ome.

KEEPER [*sourly*]: Your brother-in-law's too fond o' jokes.

BERT: It'd be a lark to fetch 'im along 'ere and confront old Scotty wiv 'im. Can't you picture it—?

SAM: It'd serve 'im right.

BERT: You owe 'im one for reminding you as your neck wanted washing.

SAM: I could git 'im nah! I knows w'ere 'e goes for 'is drink after the show of a night. Wot's the time?

BERT [*turning and looking at clock in stall*]· Nigh on the 'arf 'our.

SAM: I'll catch 'im w'ile 'e's bein' turned out. [*Starts off R. but stops.*] I say—you'll keep 'im 'ere till I comes back wiv Alf.

BERT: 'E won't get away once I gets me ten commandments on 'im.

[SAM *exits down R. hastily.*]

BERT [*gleefully*]: Now we'll 'ave a bit o' fun.

KEEPER [*shaking his head regretfully at him*]: You've got a bad 'eart, Bert.

SMALL MAN: Oh, a naughty, wicked 'eart.

BERT: Are you speakin' to me?
SMALL MAN: Yes, please.
BERT: Well, don't.
KEEPER [*gathering in* BERT's *cup*]: Fivepence, please.
BERT: Frippence.
KEEPER: Fivepence.
BERT: 'Ow do you make that out?
KEEPER: Two cawfees, two bread an' butters, packet o' woodbines, an' a seed cake.
SMALL MAN [*sadly*]: You know that ain't the food for a growing boy.
BERT: Two cawfees? I only 'ad one.
KEEPER: Wot price your friend?
BERT: That's nothin' to do with me.
KEEPER: Come on now.
BERT: 'E'll be coming back soon.
KEEPER: Then you can get it back orf 'im w'en 'e does. Come on.

[*Holds out his hand determinedly.*]

BERT: Oh, you're a shark.

[*Hands over coppers.*]

SMALL MAN [*in his child-like voice*]: Please sir, if I run 'ome will you pay for me too?
BERT: I'll pay *you*. 'Ullo, 'ere's ol' two yards an' 'arf o' misery. Nah we'll see.

[*The* AUTOCRAT *enters down L. and paces steadily past the stall.*]

SMALL MAN [*under his breath*]: There's a sell!
BERT [*hailing the* AUTOCRAT]: Ain't you goin' to stop an' have a chat, old man?
AUTOCRAT [*stopping a couple of yards from the*

stall's end]: I wasn't thinking of doing any such thing, sir.

BERT: You don't bear any malice agin me for 'avin' disagreed with you, I 'ope. I quite see that you 'ave a right to your opinions, same as I 'ave to mine.

AUTOCRAT: That's a' richt, sir.

BERT: I wanted to ask you something, but I can't reckerlect wot it was. Per'aps if you'd do me the favor to stop—and 'ave a cup o' coffee wi' me, I might be able to think of it.

AUTOCRAT: Thenk ye. I've had all the coffee I want this nicht.

BERT [*reluctantly producing flask*]: Per'aps you'd care for a drop o' whisky 'n' water, sir.

AUTOCRAT: Eh? [*Comes to R. end of stall and accepting flask, takes a pull.*] Thenk ye.

[BERT *holds out his hand for flask, but the* AUTOCRAT *is tasting the whisky on his tongue and doesn't notice.*]

BERT [*trying to call attention to his outstretched hand*]: I'm sorry it's not Scotch, sir.

AUTOCRAT: It's guid whisky, an' guid Irish is no' to be despised.

[*Takes another pull.*]

BERT: I *prefer* Irish, meself.

AUTOCRAT: Every man to his taste. Here's tae ye. [*Takes a good pull and hands back flask which* BERT *measures with his eye.*] I'm obleeged to ye.

BERT: Don't mention it.

AUTOCRAT [*with new geniality*]: Noo, what was it ye were wanting to ask me about?

BERT: I can't some'ow reckerlect it. [*With an inspiration.*] Somethin' to do with soldierin'.

AUTOCRAT [*with a return of his forbidding manner*]: I thought ye had a puir opeenion o' the profession o' arms.

BERT: Me? Oh, no.

AUTOCRAT: If ye canna think of it I'll be sayin' guid nicht.

BERT: No, no. Don't gow orf like that. I may think of it any minute. 'Ere, 'ave another drop o' whisky.

AUTOCRAT: Thenk ye.

[*Takes flask.*]

KEEPER [*aside to* SMALL MAN]: We shall be 'avin' 'im like 'e was larst week in a minute.

SMALL MAN: 'Ope 'e doesn't fall on me, that's all.

BERT [*who has been racking his brains for a topic of conversation wherewith to detain the other*]: It was—something to do with what you were saying about the spoils of the enemy—

AUTOCRAT: The spoils of the *conquered*, eh?

BERT [*eagerly*]: Yes, that's it.

AUTOCRAT: Well, what about it?

[*Takes another pull at flask. The whisky is beginning to have visible effect upon him. He sways slightly, and his peculiar manner is exaggerated.*]

BERT: Ah, that's it! What do you think about it?

AUTOCRAT [*seriously*]: I'm afraid you're the waurse for drink, sir. Ye don't seem able to express yerself coherently.

BERT: I've got it! Wot's done now to prevent soldiers 'elpin' themselves as you say they should. Wot would be done to a chap as was caught—

AUTOCRAT: Caught looting, eh? Ah, I can tell ye

that. Ye've come to the right man to learn that. General Court Martial, four years' imprisonment, and kicked out o' the Service for taking a few ounces of gold and some damn Dutch notes from the bodies o' Britain's enemies, an' a few ounces more from their homes. But that's the way war—

BERT: 'Ere, steady, old man. I only arst out of curiosity—you needn't spit all over me.

AUTOCRAT [*in the same excited vein*]: The army's all damn policemen now. Watching each other to see no one oversteps the mark.

BERT: All right, all right. Take it easy. 'Ave a drop more o' my whisky, if there's any left.

AUTOCRAT [*pulling himself together*]: Thenk ye. I'm a hot tempered man.

BERT: You are that.

[SAM *returns with another man—the brother-in-law whom he has been to fetch.* ALF *is choking with laughter.*]

ALF: W'ich one?

SAM [*as they approach the stall*]: The—

ALF: Right, 'ere goes. [*Approaches* AUTOCRAT *softly and slaps him familiarly on the back.*] 'Ullo, old sporty. I 'ear you was with me— [*The* AUTOCRAT *turns.* ALF *after one look at him draws himself up to attention and salutes quietly.*] Beg pardon, sir.

AUTOCRAT [*peering into his face*]: Sedly, isn't it?

ALF: Yessir.

AUTOCRAT: I'm glad to see ye again. Stand easy. Hoo's yer wife?

[*His manner is the friendly officer to the well disciplined soldier.*]

SEDLY: Rather poorly, sir.
AUTOCRAT: I'm sorry to hear that. [*Turning to* BERT.] I've still got your flask.
[*Returns it.*]
SAM [*whispering*]: What's up?
SEDLY: Shut yer mouth. It's the boss.
SAM: Oo?
SEDLY: The colonel.
[SAM *indulges in a prolonged whistle. The others look on in dumb wonder.*]
AUTOCRAT [*turning back to his old soldier*]: Ye've left the army, I see, Sedly.
SEDLY: Yessir.
AUTOCRAT: Quite right. The army's no place for a man in times like these.
SEDLY [*respectfully*]: The Service League wouldn't agree with you, sir.
AUTOCRAT [*hotly*]: The Service League wants to make us all into Policemen. [*More calmly.*] What are ye doing now, Sedly?
SEDLY: Workin' at the Standard Music 'all at present, sir. Flyman.
AUTOCRAT [*cracking a joke*]: Ah, supporting the arts!
SEDLY: But that's only temporary, sir.
AUTOCRAT: Aye?
SEDLY [*with a touch of pride*]: Yessir, I'm going into the force.
AUTOCRAT [*sharply*]: The what?
SEDLY: The force, sir. Police force.
AUTOCRAT [*with intense scorn and rising anger*]: Ye're going into the Police! An old man of mine is going to be a Policeman to frighten babies and

chase little boys about the park. Man, Sedly, can ye no' find honest work to do? [SEDLY, *stands steady and waits for the storm to pass.* AUTOCRAT *more in surprise than anger.*] An' you're the man who would 'a' come back for me at Maardburg! [*Suddenly and furiously.*] I'll tell ye what ye can do when ye're a full-fledged policeman, Sedly. Ye can come along to seventy-two Millbank Street and tak' *me.* Aye! There'll mebbe be some none too pleased to see me, but I'm doon as a wanted man. Ye understand? Ye can arrest *me,* sir, when ye've got your commission, or your warrant, or whatever ye call it. Mebbe ye'll see my picture in your rogues' gallery when ye come to study it. "David McLeod, Lieutenant-Colonel. Desertion in time o' war while under arrest an' awaiting Court Martial for looting." Ye'd like to arrest me, Sedly?

SEDLY [*stolidly*]: I shouldn't at all, sir, thank you.

AUTOCRAT: Ye're no policeman yet, sir, ye'll have to learn, ye'll have to learn. An' ye can —

[*His excitement terminates in another burst of coughing.*]

KEEPER [*quietly*]: You pop off 'ome, my lad. [*To* SAM.] And take your blooming brother-in-law with you.

SAM: I never guessed it was—

KEEPER: Yes, that's all jolly fine. Now pop off.

SAM: Come on, Alf.

SEDLY: 'Arf a mo'. Excuse me, sir— [*The* AUTOCRAT—still coughing—turn to him.] I'm sorry you think so bad of me, sir. I don't think I deserve it.

AUTOCRAT [*feebly, through his cough*]: Ye put your hand on me like a policeman.

KEEPER [*warningly in background*]: Pop off.

SEDLY: Sorry, sir, good night.

[*Salutes and exits with* SAM *R. All the* AUTOCRAT'S *temper has evaporated and he stands feebly against the stall. The* KEEPER *looks doubtfully at the* SMALL MAN.]

KEEPER: I wonder if you'd mind seein' 'im 'ome?

BERT: I will. I never thought—

SMALL MAN [*in response to a nod from the* KEEPER]: Can I see you 'ome, sir?

AUTOCRAT: Eh? Thenk ye. I'm feeling rather tired. [*Takes the other's arm.*] He'll know where to find me, won't he? [*Chuckles feebly.*] Dirty Policeman!

[*The* AUTOCRAT *exits leaning on the arm of the* SMALL MAN. BERT *remains very subdued by the counter.*]

BERT: Straight, if I'd known—

[*Shakes his head and is silent.* SEDLY *returns from down R.*]

KEEPER [*looking up*]: 'Ullo! Wot 'ave you come back for?

SEDLY [*seriously*]: I say, does 'e often go on like that?

KEEPER: Never 'eard 'im before.

SEDLY: 'Ope to Gawd 'e doesn't or 'e'll be copped.

KEEPER: 'E's really wanted?

SEDLY: I suppose 'e must be. 'E was under arrest I know. Serious case. I suppose 'e bolted. 'E was always a bit queer.

BERT [*quietly*]: Looks awfully down on 'is luck now, don't 'e?

SEDLY: Poor old Boss.

BERT [*voicing his thoughts*]: 'E owes George 'ere for 'is bit o' supper to-night.

SEDLY: Does 'e?

[KEEPER *nods.*]

SEDLY [*suddenly placing a shilling on the counter.*] 'Ere, take it out o' that. And if 'e wants anything else let 'im 'ave it, from me.

BERT [*looking at him curiously*]: I believe you're blubbin'.

SEDLY: Well—I've got something to blub about, 'aven't I?

BERT [*slowly*]: Yes. [*After a pause.*] It just shows yer, don't it?

CURTAIN

THE GOOSEBERRY MANDARIN

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THE GOOSEBERRY MANDARIN

by

Grace Dorcas Ruthenburg

CHARACTERS

Prologue
Fing-loo
Mandarin
Willow Tree

Time: *Morning.*
Place: *A Chinese gooseberry garden.*

Scene: *At the back is a wall in a sacred state of minor dilapidation. Just in front of it, in the center backstage, is a willow tree unimaginably old. On either side of it are suggestions of gooseberry bushes with paths between them, a garden bench and a Pekinese bridge.* Prologue *comes over the bridge in a coolie coat and a helmet woven of reeds. He bows a Chinese bow, and speaks.*

Prologue

Once it happened in gold Cathay
(That word means China, by the way)

There lived a mandarin most holy
Who had a single daughter solely.
Here in their half fantastic garden,
Fit to grow plums or spikenard in,
Woe is me, though they have plenty
Of gooseberry bushes—seven and twenty—
They have no other fruit at all
To pluck, from the walk to yonder wall,
Since the Mong-Wing ancestor first decreed
He'd plant no plant but a gooseberry seed.
Over the garden wall you see
This languorous weeping willow tree.
Great sights it will witness to-day, or ought to,
For the Prince of Shanghai weds the Mong-Wing daughter.
Lo, here she comes from the golden palace,
The lovely Fing-loo (Chinese for Alice).

. . .

[PROLOGUE *bows and goes, trippingly and balancing his hat, as* FING-LOO *enters with drooping head, goes to the bench and sitting down upon it, begins to weep.* THE WILLOW TREE *waves its branches lightly in rhythm to her sobs.*]

FING-LOO: O Willow Tree, what shall I do? My father the Mandarin has sent me from the palace in his anger on my wedding day. Because there were gooseberries for breakfast. Always, always the Mong-Wings have had gooseberries. First my father refused to have them for dinner, then he declined to accept them for lunch, and now for breakfast the illustrious ancestral appetite rejects its gooseberries.

[*The* MANDARIN *can be heard off-stage growling "Gr-r-r-." Fing-loo rises and kneels with her head on the garden path as the* MANDARIN *comes in, stamping and holding up his robe with one hand to exhibit his golden shoes. His purple coat is decorated with the sacred golden parrot.*]

MANDARIN: Have you yet found me a banana growing in the ancestral garden?

FING-LOO [*weeping*]: Nay, Father, you know well that our admirable ancestor Mong-Wing planted only gooseberries.

MANDARIN:

Gooseberries! Gooseberries! Here and there!
They're tart, they're sour, they're everywhere.
Think! to be Mandarin, and warden
Of nothing but only a gooseberry garden.
I'm sick of them.

Where other Mandarins ramble at leisure
Taking their gastronomic pleasure—
Come in their coats with the golden parrot
To sample each currant and plum and carrot,
I have nothing but gooseberries.

Where other Mandarins nibble and munch
At oranges, apples and grapefruit for lunch,
I have nothing but gooseberry jam.
You can see for yourselves what a wreck I am.
[*He pauses to kick at the bushes.*]

FING-LOO: Exquisite parent, I beg of you not to be angry. I have come all the way from the crystal house on shoes more small than a half-grown mouse

to see if the wind might not have brought a single raspberry bush to spring by chance in the garden.

MANDARIN: Who said anything about raspberries? It's a banana I want.

FING-LOO: You couldn't plant a single banana?

MANDARIN: When my great-uncle's second wife's fourth cousin planted the original gooseberry bush in the Mong-Wing backyard the day that garden wall was begun, 820 years ago next Monday? It would be a sacrilege. I must bear my hunger.

FING-LOO: Did you not have for breakfast your usual fishes' eye?

MANDARIN: Of course.

FING-LOO: And your customary stew of alligator wings?

MANDARIN: Naturally.

FING-LOO: And your habitual tea made of the water of the sacred if somewhat insanitary river?

MANDARIN [*impatiently*]: Yes, yes.

FING-LOO: Then, respected parent, can you not content yourself without fruit?

MANDARIN: It is still a banana I estimably crave. [FING-LOO *weeps.*] A banana, yellow as the moon, curved like the arch of a bridge across the sacred river.

FING-LOO: Import them, worthy one! The waves are noisy with your sacred ships.

MANDARIN: Never! Alien bananas, unchinese?—bananas from over foreign seas? How should a Mong-Wing eat of fruits from other than ancestral shoots?

FING-LOO: Ingratiatingly cease to consider them and come within to my nuptials!

MANDARIN: Has the Prince of Shanghai come?
FING-LOO: You can hear far down the river the fanfare of his approach. [*A trumpet sounds far off down the river.* FING-LOO *is struck with a thought that sets the blue tails of her coat a-flutter.*] My father, if we were to pray to this most sacred our ancestral tree?

[*They kneel side by side.*]

TOGETHER:

O willow, willow,
Plant of the first Mong-Wing,
Grant to your last noteworthy son
This inconsequential thing.

O willow, willow,
That has wept eight hundred years,
Can you not give one slender branch
To fruit instead of tears?

O willow, willow,
That weeps for a hundred hearts,
E'en Mandarins grow dyspeptic on
Hereditary tarts.

[*The* WILLOW TREE *waves softly. Nothing happens.*]

MANDARIN [*bitterly, after a pause*]: Nothing. [*He turns to the tree.*] Listen! For eight hundred and twenty years the Mong-Wing family has cherished you, sacred tree. The servants have been beaten that failed to water you, the wind has been hushed that made havoc in your branches. And now this first thing I ask of you is refused. [*He goes a step closer, shouting into the tremulous branches.*] O sacred

tree, harken! I will not let my daughter marry until you vouchsafe to this garden a banana.

FING-LOO [*aghast*]: Father!—

MANDARIN: I have spoken.

FING-LOO: But the Prince of Shanghai is waiting outside.

MANDARIN: Let him bide.

FING-LOO: The guests are gathered at the gate.

MANDARIN: Let them wait.

FING-LOO: The wines are here and the orchestra come.

MANDARIN: Let them strum.

FING-LOO: You will not?

MANDARIN: Will not.

FING-LOO: Never?

MANDARIN: Never. [*He shakes his clasped hands at the tree.*] Ever!

[*And goes.* FING-LOO *sinks down, crying bitterly.*]

FING-LOO:

Woe is me, I shall never see
By the sacred river's billow
Bananas grow from a Chinese tree,
Especially a willow.

Better to feel the bitter steel
Than to face a lonely pillow.
Better is death by holding my breath
Than grow old and a maiden still—

[*She draws a dagger from her breast.*]

Oh! . . .

[*The* WILLOW TREE *shakes through all its*

branches, a mighty though slender convulsion.]

WILLOW TREE: Maiden, nay, do not die!

FING-LOO: Who speaks?

WILLOW TREE: The Willow Tree. It is I.

FING-LOO [*getting up from her knees*]: The Willow speaking?

WILLOW TREE: I, the illustrious willow planted by the first Mong-Wing, do speak. Maiden, pray do not die.

FING-LOO: Alas, sacred willow, you heard!

WILLOW TREE: You shall marry the proud Shanghai.

FING-LOO: My father has pledged his word.

WILLOW TREE:

You shall wed him in satin,
In Chinese and Latin;
Oh, charmingly cease to cry.

FING-LOO:

O, Willow, you couldn't have heard—
If he'd asked for a scarlet bird,
Or a coat encrusted
With stars unrusted,
A moon, or a magic word!

But to want a banana
In this ruthless manner:
A thing that has never occurred!

WILLOW TREE: It is granted to a sacred tree once in a lifetime to have its wish.

FING-LOO: No!

WILLOW TREE: I am getting old, Fing-loo.

FING-LOO [*more tenderly*]: No!

WILLOW TREE: You shall have your banana.

FING-LOO: Why do you do this for me?

WILLOW TREE: Trees, too, can love.

FING-LOO: You love. . . ?

WILLOW TREE: I knew your great-aunt Foo-ling-foo, whose eyes were almond flowers. I knew your great-great-aunt Soo-ling-soo, whose lips were honeysuckle under the moon. I knew your great-great-great-aunt, Too-ling-too, whose hair was the floating of phosphorescent fish. You are all these and more, Fing-loo.

FING-LOO: And you will do this for me?

WILLOW TREE: For you! [*First the tip of a banana is seen slowly descending below the proscenium arch, then its curve and gradually it hangs completely in view.*] Princess!

FING-LOO [*bowing deeply with her hands to the ground, rises and with a glance around, goes close to the* WILLOW TREE *and gracefully kisses its trunk. With another look backward she runs to the side calling*]: O most eminent, esteemed and sagacious parent! Deign to come from your golden revered palace into the gooseberry garden and receive your respectable banana! . . .

[*The* MANDARIN *comes, holding up his robe with one hand and waving the other with excitement.*]

MANDARIN: Quickly! Quickly! Let them pick it!

FING-LOO: How! No one else can come into the sacred gooseberry garden.

MANDARIN: I shall do it myself. . . . [*He reaches,*

[*It sinks to the ground, its branches spread out in a gray-green mat like a prayer-rug for* FING-LOO'S *feet. There is a burst of wedding music from over the wall as the curtain falls.*]

THE END

but he is not tall enough.] Let them climb the wall from without! Quickly!

*FING-LOO: I shall pick it!

[*She climbs upon the bench with graceful difficulty and determination, reaches up and plucks the banana gently while the* MANDARIN *mutters, "Breakfast! Breakfast!" She climbs down again and with a bow offers it to her father, but the* MANDARIN *already is striding toward the palace. A trumpet sounds close.* FING-LOO *starts to follow him, with a lingering glance for the tree.*]

WILLOW TREE: Maiden! [FING-LOO *turns.*] . . . The Prince of Shanghai!

[*The trumpet sounds again.* FING-LOO *picks up a fallen withe and clasps it inside her coat as she runs over the bridge. There is a sound of wedding music beyond the wall. The* WILLOW TREE, *left alone, trembles perceptibly.*] . . . In my illustrious nine hundred years I have not been so happy. . . . [*It begins to totter.*] . . . You will never . . . tell her . . . will you . . . gentle audience . . . that a sacred tree . . . that has its wish . . . must die? [*The* WILLOW *sways more and more, its branches swinging in sad languor to and fro.*] . . . My leaves shrivel. . . . Delicious pains rise like a fountain through my veins. . . . My leaves burn and tingle. . . . My sap grows fire. . . . [*Its voice is growing weaker.*] You will tell her . . . it was the wind . . . came by? [*It lurches lightly.*] . . . the wind? . . .

**[For greater ease in marionette production, omit down to "Breakfast! Breakfast!" and substitute a guignol servant who leans over the wall and plucks the fruit.]*